



庵田定夏
Sadanatsu Ando

KOKORO-CONNECT KIZU-RANDOM

ココロコネクト キズランダム

ファミ通文庫

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“人格入れ替わり”現象を乗り越え、太一たち文研部員はおだやかな日常を取り戻した。そんなある日の放課後、突如稲葉が太一に襲いかかる！ さらに唯が見せた、机を叩き割るという過剰な行為。そして太一と伊織には奇妙な感覚が湧きあがった——体が、勝手に、動き出す？ そんな矢先、太一は青木と唯が補導されたと聞かされて……!? 再び現れたへふうせんかずらと新たな試練。それは五人の絆を打ち砕く！ 愛と青春の五角形コメディ、痛みと涙の第二弾!!

庵田定夏

Sadanatsu Ando

1988年生まれ大阪出身。
第11回えんため大賞特別賞を
受賞しデビュー。好きな食べ
物は『麺類全般』、嫌いな食
べ物は『特になし』。好きな
プロレスの技は『シュートイ
ングスタープレス』、嫌いな
プロレスの技は『見栄えより
危険度の方が高い技全般』。
健康と安全をモットーに生き
ています。

白身魚

Shiromizakana

繊細かつ柔らかな絵柄で知ら
れる実力派イラストレーター。
『14歳』『少年少女』という
キーワードにひたすら弱く、
小説では「カラフル」「アー
モンド入りチョココレートのワ
ルツ」、実写では「花とアリ
ス」などが好き。

KOKORO-CONNECT KIZU-RANDOM

ココロコネクト
キズランダム







9
日目

「やめろっつってんだらうが
そこの二人っつ!」



「稲葉が
その程度の人間だなんて
思わなかった」

8
日目



1
日目

「手……血。えっ……これやったの
あたしだよ。夢じゃない……」

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Prologue

Without any warning.

"Do it."

A voice echoing so clearly that it would make one sick.

The voice echoed, sending a chilling feeling through the spine as if it were directly whispering to it.

Who was it?

Though this thought came up, it was puzzling. That was obviously my own voice.

Meanwhile, this body became hotter.

This face became red, and this head felt dizzy.

As if possessed by drowsiness, my own senses gradually melted away.

My own body slowly escaped my grip.

As if I was not longer myself.

The body attempted to act on its own.

Eaten away by something.

But my consciousness did not fade away, as my thoughts were clear.

Thoughts that went against my will emerged.

A certain feeling of "wanting to" began to rampage in my body. As I tried to suppress that feeling, I was bounced off right away. The impulse only kept on sparking more.

That's enough. Stop it. Shut up. Hold it. You mustn't do that.

However——

My body moved. Even though I didn't want it to, it moved. My mind and body were disconnected. I didn't want to do it yet I really wanted to do it... Strange, did that mean I wanted to do it all along? Hence my body acted according to that wish?

Thoughts against my will that emerged?

Were actually not against my will?

"Make the wish come true."

The voice echoed again.

That was definitely my own voice, but not my will.

Baffling. My head rocking. My body boiling.

And then I noticed the situation before me.

I almost wanted to scream "When did it..." but didn't.

Terrified by what I was about to do.

My heart shouted "Stop it!" but there was no sound.

Watching myself from distant isolation.

My mouth moving.

However, the words were not what I had hoped for.

Was my body taken over? By whom? By what? By me?

Was it by me?

Wait. Can't wait. Don't want to wait?

Stop. Don't want to stop?

Something had happened.

Something had changed.

—— Ah, can't stop it. Can't stop it. Can't stop it. Can't stop it. Can't stop it.

Can't stop it. Can't stop it. Can't stop it.

—— Don't want it to stop?

Chapter 1 - Can't Stop It, Can't Stop It, Can't Stop It!

The Literature Club (LC for short) in Yamaboshi High School, the school Yaegashi Taichi was studying in, was established because of a defect in the school rules stating that every student had to join a club. There were only five members in this club. Their motto was "to break all constraints and rules, so as to investigate everything in a different light". In other words, 'doing whatever they wanted' was a fair analogy.

The activities in the LC were basically simple and fell short of the anticipations of normal clubs. The club publishes the «Bunken News» monthly, a product extended from each member's interests. But to be honest, it was just too casual.

Nevertheless, the LC was suddenly thrown into a 'more-than-unusual' phenomenon.

The club members encountered «Heartseed».

The 'personality exchange' phenomenon landed among the five club members randomly.

Just by hearing the context the incident was hard to believe. One might laugh and say, "How can anything like this happen on Earth."

But this did happen and it engulfed Taichi as well as the other LC members.

Even if one did not want to believe, once it happened, one could only resort to believing; even if one wanted to escape, once there was no way to escape, one could only exercise patience.

They had once agonized over this, felt pain from this, and got hurt by this.

But they worked as a team and overcame this crisis.

And because of their extreme situation they understood a lot of things.

Luckily, what was left on Taichi and the others was this 'lot of things' and not dismal scars that couldn't be obliterated.

Three weeks had passed since then. The autumn atmosphere was gradually becoming denser.

The scary incident had burnt into their chests; however, the 'story' had gradually faded and became 'the past' to them .



After school was finished, the bell rang, hurrying students to leave.

"Damn it~ There's still a little bit left, crap!"

Inaba Himeko cruelly hit the computer and moved her hands away from the laptop. She loudly smacked her lips while irascibly scratching her bright and beautiful, black, medium to long hair.

Inaba's grouchy mood also turned the Literature Club clubroom in room 401 of the Recreational Building into heaven and hell.

"Inaban...I believed in you!"

The most beautiful maiden in the school, Nagase Iori, was resting on the table. She was incessantly shaking her head on the table, swaying her hair that was bundled at the back of her head together.

"Hurray! Even Inaba cannot get it done!"

The tall and thin teenager who jumped was Aoki Yoshifumi.

"So, Iori, you have to buy me juice on our way home today~"

His slightly long and curly hair jumped along with his waving hands and dancing feet.

Nagase and Aoki had bet on 'whether Inaba Himeko could finish the «Bunken News» in time', and their bet just ended.

"I had already said before that Inaba's work progress was obviously delayed because of you guys. I don't know how you can make this bet and not feel ashamed of yourselves."

Petite and firm, along with long chestnut hair, Kiriya Yui unwillingly murmured.

"Yeah, she's right."

Yaegashi Taichi uttered his assent.

If this continues, the heavenly punishment might descend soon.

"Hahaha~ I'm going to win~ After all, Inaba isn't a perfect superwoman—she also has her limits!"

"Mmm...Is this all Inaba Himeko is capable of?"

Aoki and Nagase proceeded to their hearts' content.

"But you don't need to be feel dejected for this, Inaba." Aoki said.

"But still, I hope you can have the slightest sense of your responsibility.

Cough" Nagase said.

The two kept on babbling.

"Shut up!"

Inaba poked the eyes of the two on the upper part of their eyelids. This was certainly what they deserved.

" "Ouch Ouch Ouch!" "

Nagase and Aoki struggled and fidgeted.

Looking at their struggle, Taichi and Kiriya glaced at each other and smiled wryly.

"Inaba could accurately poke on four eyes with just two fingers on each hand...Her talent is more than what meets the eye."

"I think she is already marvelous even if she didn't have that talent."

Though Taichi did not really say it, he could felt the terror lying within.

"It's because of your late articles that I'm in trouble! Thanks to you, I must now bring it home and finish it! So I say, Aoki, the juice is mine."

Inaba grabbed Aoki by the shoulders and stared at him with her thinning eyes.

"Eh...This isn't right. Those are two different agreements."

An ominous cracking sound emerged.

"I-I understand~~~~"

"So I was saying, I should give my juice to Inaban because she did so much for us. Ahaha!"

"I-Iori, why are you suddenly on my side? All the typing work I did is now in vain...don't you understand my loss?"

"What loss? Who the hell told you to propose a rectification of the article? Isn't it your fault?"

Kiriyama knitted her straight and upright brows, saying.

"Does Taichi agree with them?"

"Yeah...That article wasn't appropriate, and its content seemed weak. Indeed, my article 'Wrestling Technique Theory~ Ropework Camerawork~', which has stronger content, is better—"

"Tsk! Crap, I chose the wrong person to speak to..."

"...In reality, looking at others complaining to themselves privately would unexpectedly hurt myself."

It was rare that Kiriyama would smack her tongue. Maybe I stepped on one of her landmines, but where did I do wrong?

"Eh! But I think a better idea would be 'This is an interview aimed at the boys in Yamaboshi High school! Who's the cutest girl in the Literature Club? What is the cutest? This is a large-scale interview!'"

Aoki seemed to be infatuated with his own idea.

"I. Don't. Want. That! I don't want to gain attention by such strange means. And if you are asking who's the cutest, Iori must be crowned champion. I

won't lament even if I lost to Iori, but I don't want to join a competition in which I'm destined to lose miserably!"

"Maybe you will win, Yui. Lately, pedophiles seem to be on the rise. Taichi is one of those suspects."

Nagase said this lightly with a smile that contained no malice.

"Nagase, what you said implies that if Kiriyaama doesn't gain support from pedophiles, she will be destined to lose to you; and the same time, you hurt me with your evil tongue—I'm not a pedophile!"

It was Nagase's honesty rather than her evil tongue. Lately that trend seemed to be getting acute. By the way, this sharp-tongued response seemed a bit too long.

"What are you guys saying? Iori's cuteness is a fact, but Yui also has many hidden fans!"

Aoki grinned confidently.

"Why hidden? Hey, could it be that you really are a pedophile..."

Just when Kiriyaama was becoming scared, Inaba potently slammed the table.

"Get ready to go home now! Why should I, who working the most seriously, wait for you guys now after I finish packing up!"

She was right.

Everyone left the Recreational Building and walked to the front gates together.

The sun seemed to have sunk. The sports clubs had also ended their practice.

"I-Inaban, is this all right?"

Nagase followed their agreement and ran to the vending machine to buy canned coffee for Inaba.

"Yeah. Though I said you guys did stupid things, letting you pay for it still makes me apologetic."

Inaba moved to take her wallet from her schoolbag.

"No, no. After all, we always trouble you to help us organize the things we made. This can of coffee isn't anything when compared to that."

Nagase said with an deliberately exaggerated tone. After that, Inaba took the coffee calmly.

"Even at the end, you show no sign of being sorry for the troubles you caused."

Kiriyama superciliously looked at Aoki.

"Umm...I will compensate for that later..."

Aoki sorrowfully drooped his head, but then he raised it immediately.

"Ah~ Though that was what I said, I think if my article was adopted, things wouldn't end up so troublesome like now!"

"That article you wrote should have indeed been rejected!"

Just as Aoki and Kiriyama started their argument, a sound came from their backs.

"Ohoh, hello there. Have the club activities today ended? You guys are really serious~ I'm proud to be your advisor, though I've done nothing at all."

The person speaking was the one who students referred to as 'Go' and loved (but also despised) by some students, the class teacher of Class 1C and the adviser of the Literature Club, Gotou Ryuusen. His frivolous and carefree attitude is the best among the teachers (of course this is not a word of praise).

"Ah, Right. Inaba, Nagase, and Yaegashi."

These three were students of Class 1C; hence, their class teacher was him.

"Actually I have an emergency, so the content of tomorrow's second lesson and a day after that day's third lesson will change, but I forgot to tell the students. What should I do now..."

"What should you do?! Please be more serious when dealing with classroom matters at least!"

Inaba (a student) was seriously teaching Gotou (a teacher). It was a scene so familiar, it became terrifying.

"This time I know the responsibility is on myself. After all, I troubled everyone...And the teacher substituting me should become furious by then..."

"In any case you're just worrying about the latter matter."

Inaba slightly stared at Gotou with her narrowing eyes.

"N-Not exactly! I'm only wary of it!"

"Is there any difference?"

Inaba was almost about to exert violence on Gotou. To stop this from happening, Taichi decided to reconcile them.

"In short, we'll notify you via message as soon as possible."

"Yeah, so don't worry, Go."

Nagase also helped the reconciliation.

"Yaegashi...and Nagase...you two are such passionate and helpful students...Thanks for your help!"

He was a (male and 25-year-old) teacher who, when you give him an inch, will easily take a yard.



The next day after school, Taichi and Inaba went to the clubroom together from their class. Nagase would come later, as it was her turn to clean the classroom today.

"Oi, Taichi and Inaba!"

Taichi turned his head to see who was calling him and hence saw Aoki and Kiriyaama.

"It's you guys...eh? What do you guys have to do?"

Taichi asked, as he saw Aoki and Kiriyaama heading toward the opposite direction of the Recreational Building.

"Yeah. I'm on duty today, so I have some work to deal with," Kiriyaama answered.

"I'm on duty too! Taichi, do you know? Yui and I are on duty together each time as if we're bundled together with the red string of destiny."

"That's only because there are few girls whose name starts with 'A'^[1] that we're assigned on duty together!"

"Yui, that's already destiny!"

"Maybe...Ah! I almost agreed with you! Gosh, how could I be so careless..."

"Hey. So this means that you guys will be coming to the clubroom a bit later, am I correct?" Inaba interrupted.

"Ah, Yeah. Sorry, Inaba."

"Fine."

Inaba patiently waited for Kiriya and Aoki to leave. After that, she muttered, "It's too bad that I even helped them finish the article for «Bunken News» all by myself at home yesterday."

Being aware of Inaba's bad mood, Taichi told himself to be careful of his words...

"Hey, Taichi. Don't you think that, even though it's not entirely their fault, it's infuriating to have to wait for them?"

This was room 401 in the Recreational Building. Sitting in front of Taichi, Inaba said that while she turned on her notebook.

"Nah...if they didn't have any responsibility, there's no use in getting angry at them..."

Taichi tried to convince Inaba in an attempt to reduce the damage done to the three people who would be coming in later.

"Yes. But anger still fills me, right?"

"Yeah...you may be a bit irascible."

"So I will want to vent my anger, won't I?"

"No. That is insensible."

"It is sensible; I can vent my anger to make me less irascible."

"Don't wear a satisfied smile like that while saying such terrible things; that's just pushing your anger onto others."

"Doesn't the world work like that?"

"Yeah? Oh, hell no."

"Yeah, what I said is completely rubbish."

Inaba stretched her back, posing a detached attitude. In this state, what she said would be right to the ear if not given with a second thought.

Inaba laughed with a hum, and continued,

"But on the other hand letting you experience some headache could relieve my stress at just the right time."

She raised the corner of her mouth balefully.

"What the...you relieved stress and, at the same time, maneuver your anger so it won't be too much of a burden for me...What you just did is too hard—I could never learn to do this..."

"...Why are you actually admiring me for this? Are you that dumb?"

Inaba looked at Taichi disdainfully. Taichi was uneasy, as he really did praise her whole-heartedly for this.

"So, you need to study, right? I'm sorry for bothering you."

Inaba focused back on her notebook, and Taichi continued his Mathematics homework that day. Most students copy answers from their friends and would pay no attention to doing their homework. Taichi, however, always finished his homework seriously. For him, studying was a matter of building up knowledge on an everyday basis.

Both of them continued their work silently. After a while, Inaba Himeko started to take off her clothes.

She unhesitatingly took both of her hands out from her uniform coat.

Taichi consciously kept on doing his homework, while glancing at her at times and immediately turning his eyes back to his work afterwards.

Plack.

It was the sound of clothes dropping on the floor.

Taichi lifted his eyes to Inaba again.

Inaba paid no attention to her coat that dropped on the floor and took off her black sweater over her head.

"Hey, Inaba. Your coat has been dropped on the floor."

"Mmm...Ahah."

Taichi didn't know if Inaba was listening to him. All she did was reply to him with a blank face. Her face was flushed like it was burning. Furthermore, due to the effects of static electricity produced when taking off her sweater, her

black long hair that she usually kept tidy had become messy and stuck up like thorns.

Then, Inaba loosened her necktie with a phew and laid her hands on the buttons of her shirt—all in a chain of smooth actions.

Bew.

Her tender fingers unbuckled the first button.

Bew.

The second one was unbuckled.

The sounds of unbuckling buttons reverberated in the room in a strangely loud sound.

Bew.

The third one.

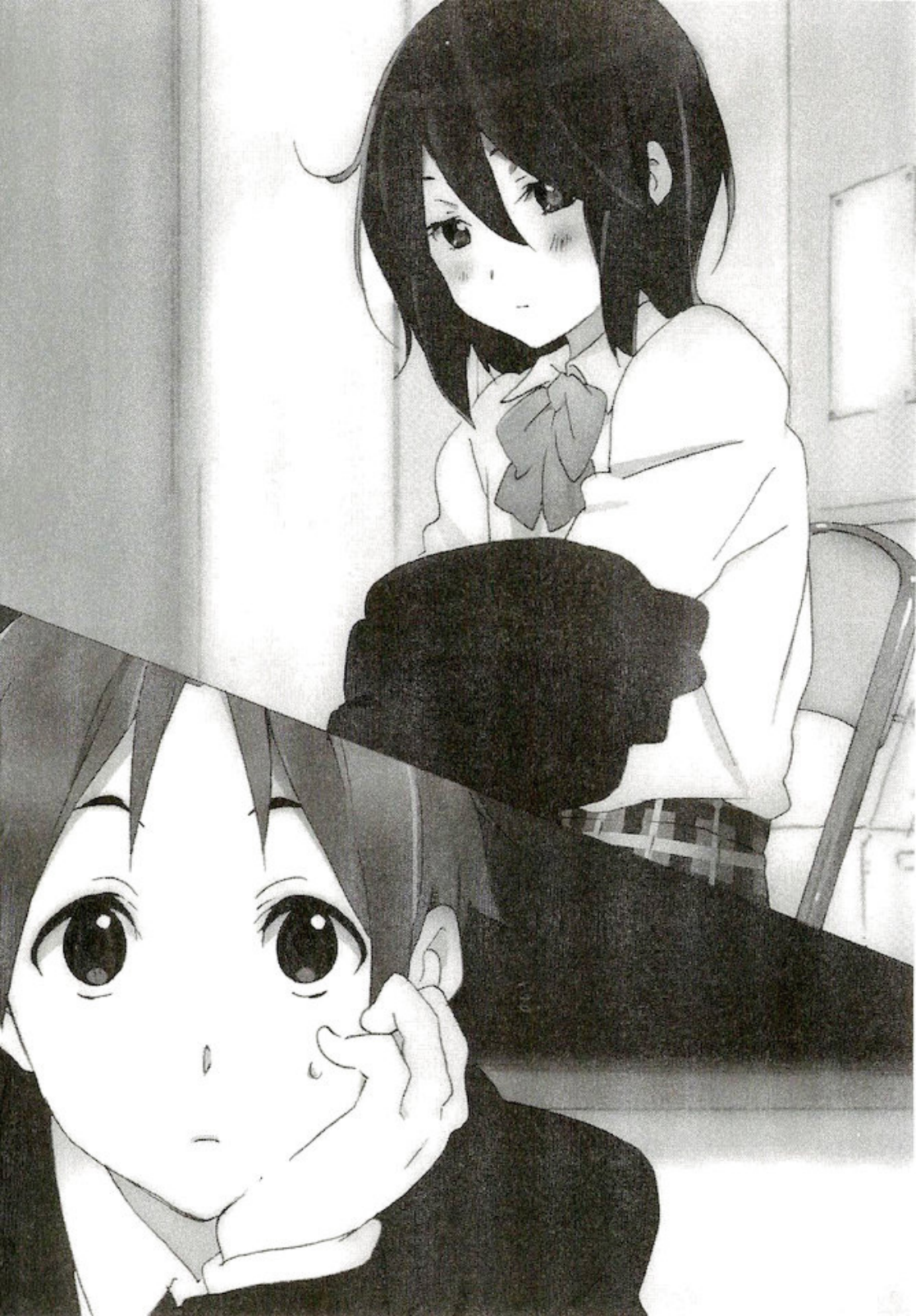
Her chest was gradually exposed. Even the parts of her skin that were normally unseen were now exposed.

The whiteness of her skin and her shirt were a bit different.

And in that whiteness, a dark colour unveiled itself with a shocking presence.

That was a dark bra.

Though without laces, it formed a polygon. Especially, some parts of the material between the two heights was almost transparent enough to see the skin that it covered, thus giving it an irresistible attractive force.



At this moment, Taichi rebooted his thinking that had temporarily been stopped.

What happened?

What is going on?

Taichi spoke with his long-zipped mouth,

"Why are you suddenly taking off your clothes?! Won't you feel cold? This is the club room, not your house! I'm here too!"

Taichi fidgeted for his late response and spoke non-stop.

Yet, Inaba was unresponsive to what he said.

She had taken off all her shirt's buttons.

"Hey! Wait! Calm down first, Inaba! D-Does your back itch? P-Please put your clothes back on!"

Despite his efforts, what happened was the complete opposite to what Taichi wanted. Inaba gripped on the collar of her shirt and pulled off her shirt in one pull, exposing her back.

Her white, tender, and smooth shoulders portrayed a beautiful curve.

Inaba let her half-taken-off shirt hanging loosely on her shoulders and waist and moved her notebook aside crudely.

After that, she stood up from her chair, pressed her knees onto the table, and leaned her body forwards adamantly.

Creak.

The table creaked as Inaba crawled on the table with all her body.

Inaba, whose upper body was half-naked, pressed on towards Taichi.

Speechless, Taichi only froze on his seat.

Taichi thought it was bad to just look at her upper body that was only covered by a black bra, so he reflexively focused his eyes on her face.

Inaba's usual icy face was pumped with hot air and had turned all vermilion, looking as if it was conveying sorrow.

"...Take your clothes off too," she met her eyes with Taichi and said.

Taichi held his breath for an instant.

"Why should I take them off? What do you want to do? We're in school! Even if we're going to do it, we'd have to find a better place...gosh, what am I saying! N-No, I didn't think of anything strange! W-Whatever, please first put your clothes back on, come on! "

He didn't know what he was saying.

"We can't do it if you don't take your clothes off, right?"

Her low female penetrating voice exuded a strong seductive atmosphere.

"What do you mean by that...Wait! Forget that! A-After all, what you mean is that, right? You're planning to say 'You idiot~ you've been tricked' when I start to misunderstand so as to play with me and alleviate your stress, right? Haha, you don't need to go so far for this..."

Chuck—His hand was caught and he could say nothing more. The parts of his hand that was caught by Inaba's small and tender fingers was aberrantly hot.

"Look..."

Inaba pulled Taichi's hand forward. She didn't use much strength, but Taichi couldn't resist it: he approached Inaba's chest like a magnet.

"W-We can't get away from this by only a joke!"

Before he touched the ample part that the breast was covering, Taichi determinedly took back his hand.

However, Inaba's hand still twined with his hand.

"Eh? Ah..."

Losing her balance, Inaba vibrantly fell on Taichi. Taichi who was sitting on the chair definitely was incapable of supporting her weight and fell backwards along Inaba's motion.

"Wuaghh!"

The folding chair and the table was kicked and banged. The two of them fell on the floor, entangled in a mess.

"Nuaghh!"

Taichi was tightly squeezed in the middle between Inaba's weight and the floor. Air in his lungs was compressed.

"Ouch Ouch Ouch Ouch! Wu...Hey, Are you fine...Wuahhh!"

Taichi wanted to protect Inaba in this sudden sweep of events. Though he acted as the cushion, he looked more like embracing Inaba's back.

"I-I don't have any intention to touch you!"

Taichi closed his eyes and pushed Inaba who was stuck to him off in a scurry.

For no apparent reason, however, his hand felt the softest yet inexplicable sensation of his lifetime.

He opened his eyes.

His hands were holding onto Inaba's breast.

This impulse froze his brain, making him speechless and numb.

At this moment, the door of the clubroom opened.

Taichi slightly averted his eyes to the door.

Kiriyama and Aoki stood frozen at the door.

What they had seen most likely would have been 'Inaba Himeko, half-naked, is riding on Yaegashi Taichi who was lying on the floor and touching Inaba's breast.' This scene was appalling just by mere imagination.

"Terrible~~~~~ What are you guys doing here~~~~~," Kiriyama screamed sharply as if trying to say she had used all her might for this scream.

It was conceivable why she did this—Taichi thought as his brain calmed down after being over its limits during the crisis.

"Separate! Separate! Separate now!"

Kiriyama cried, almost hysterically.

"Hey, hey, Kiriyama, clam down. Don't get angry yet! I know how you feel."

Aoki switched his focus to placating Kiriyama to bring her agitation under control.

"What do you know—Wuaghh!"

Taichi's words were ceased by Inaba who suddenly stood up and stepped on Taichi's abdomen.

Inaba had completely no sign of apology and picked up her uniform that had fallen off.

If you really understand her panic you should have kept silent from the very start! And please beware of the situation before doing anything—Taichi originally wanted to give vent to his discontent, but this feeling then faded instantly.

Inaba picked up her clothes, held it in front of her chest, and buckled anew the buttons on the shirt.

Her hands were trembling erratically and her face was so wan she might faint if someone were to call for her loudly.

However you look at it, Inaba's condition, including what she did just now, was erratic.

"So, what happened between you guys?"

Kiryama asked, paying no heed to Inaba's erratic look.

Kiryama's eyes, the eyes of the former gifted karate girl, was tilted slightly upwards usually, had tilted even upper like a demon. A strong anger boiled inside her tender muscles of her delicate body. Her chestnut hair looked as if it was going to strike at any moment.

"C-Can you wait for moment? We have something to get straight here—"

Taichi strived for a bit more time, but his attempts were ceased by the sounds of smashing of wood pieces. The broken sounds of an unknown matter reverberated in the clubroom and then stopped.

"Come on fess up!"

Kiriyama Yui used her fist to slice apart the long table in the two tables that had not yet fallen.

That obviously was too much.

However you put it, she had gone too far.

"Yui! What's wrong with you, Yui!"

Aoki, at her side, called her nervously.

His voice calmed Kiriyama's eyes that had been widened terribly. Her bright red face also gradually recovered white.

"What...the...Ouch! My hands...blood. Eh? The table...did I do this? This isn't a dream....but why? Why will...how the...No, I wasn't that angry...but why? It's scary...really scary."

Her eyes were filled with tears at that moment. Her body also trembled stiffly.

At this moment, the last club member—Iori Nagase—had arrived.

"Yo...What happened to the table? What's this all about? Why is the table broken? And the clubroom is all messy...Wait! Yui, you're bleeding! Let me have a look!"

She hurried to Kiriyama's side and swiftly checked her wound.

"Mmm...It's only a small cut. Wash it with water and go to the Health Room to sterilize it, okay?"

"I-Iori....Wu-Wuahh!"

"Oi, oi, what's the matter? Does it hurt? It's all right...it's fine..."

Kiriyama cried like a child. Nagase held her delicate body tightly while comforting her by saying, 'It's fine. It's fine' and combing her chestnut hair.

"All right. Taichi, Aoki, and Inaban stop looking at us blankly. Tidy up these things and report to the teacher!"

Thanks to the swift actions of Nagase who then arrived, things, at least from the surface, had come to an end.

As a result, the club members were immediately dismissed that day after tidying up those things.



During that night after Taichi got home he thought of what happened blankly in his room.

Inaba tried to lure him.

Kiriyama had been too angry.

He just thought that the two of them were not calm enough.

Although he tried to ask them, they only proposed that 'they didn't want to do it, but they did', puzzling enough.

So what happened?

Mere thinking cannot lead me to any answer.

By the way, it was fortunate Nagase was calm enough to handle the situation back then. In the turbulent clubroom, if Nagase had come later, who knows what would ensue. She was quite reliable at times when she had to act.

[Is it fine to continue on like this?]

Taichi suddenly heard a voice.

Was it from outside the room? No.

Did I hear something wrong? No.

Was it a sound I made myself? No.

Was it only a sound that was replayed in my mind? No.

Did the sound not vibrate my eardrum and directly reverberated in my head?
Yes.

What was that?

He wanted to take that as a misperception, but the sound was so distinct it was impossible to take it as a misperception.

Taichi shivered.

In common sense, it was impossible to receive sound information except from the ears.

Then his body started to heat up. Coldness faded from him and reality also faded as if it was eroded by some hot air.

It felt as if he was not himself anymore.

He gradually left himself, but his conscious was still retained.

For no apparent reason, Iori Nagase's figure filled in his brain—Her face was a bit round, but the figure of her face was very pretty. Her transparent and white skin, watery and big eyes, straight nose, and beautiful black hair that was bundled at the back of her head, and a slender, ideal body form...

Some kind of unknown force pushed Taichi.

This emotion surpassed everything else Taichi was thinking.

Taichi didn't remember he had the courage to do that.

But his body began to take action.

He grabbed his phone and ran out of his room. He operated his phone while going down the stairs from the second floor to the first.

He had a conscious to stop and to cease himself, but it was surpassed by the increasing turmoil in his body. Both thoughts violently clashed at each other, and the winner was decided instantly.

Taichi walked down the stairs and ran through the corridor. He wore his shoes at the gate, and opened the door—at this moment, the heat inside him suddenly cooled down.

He felt he had returned to his body, the strange feeling of looking at himself from the inside vanished as well as the impulse that brought him here.

He now stood blankly at the gate.

His body was originally so hot it was melting. Now everything seemed like normal as though nothing had happened. However, it certainly was gross that there weren't any trace of the vibrant change that occurred in him.

Taichi looked at his phone. 'Iori Nagase' was printed on the screen.

After Taichi had returned to his normal self, he could not figure out what really happened, so he decided to first return to his room.

He sat on the floor cross-legged as if collapsing.

What the heck was that?

That felt like he was pulled by some kind of thing that had surpassed his conscious.

He looked at his phone again. 'Iori Nagase' was still printed on the screen.

What anticipation does my body have towards Nagase?

At this moment, his phone rang Techno ^[2] music of the opening of a wrestling.

"Wuahh!"

Surprised, Taichi dropped his phone on the floor.

He fleetingly picked it back up and looked who was calling.

His heart pounced.

The caller was the one he was always thinking of just now.

Taichi suppressed the aberrantly fierce beat of his heart in his chest and received the call.

"Hey..."

"Ou, Taichi! Tell me! Are we still!" Nagase suddenly screamed.

"...Are we still..." her voice suddenly weakened, as if about to vanish.

"Wh-what's the matter, Nagase? What happened?"

"W-What...Ah...Nothing...About that...Good evening."

"A-Ahah. Good evening."

Both of them fell silent for a moment.

"Ayah, eh...it sure was tiring today, right?"

"Yeah. Definitely."

They fell silent again.

After a while, a low howling sound came from the other end.

"Ah—I'm sorry! I'm really sorry! I didn't know why but when I got back my consciousness I had already phoned you. I suddenly felt I had to chat with you no matter how and my body acted at its own will..."

—Her body acted at its own will.

This was exactly what happened to Taichi.

"A-Actually I also...what really happened? I didn't had that will...but suddenly that will, the will to meet with you or chat with you on the phone, occurred to me."

"Yeah, Sorry! This is certainly unfathomable...Eh? You have the same experience?"

That was right. Taichi also had that feeling that he wanted to hear Nagase's voice no matter what.

That feeling neglected his will and came to him explosively.

So, where did 'that kind of feeling' come from?

Did that feeling charged into him from outside because it neglected his will?

No, 'that feeling' seemed to be a part of himself.

"So what the heck is this? This is a bit strange."

"This is...what is this?"

Nagase had the same question as Taichi.

For an instant the aberrant actions of Inaba and Kiriya reoccurred to Taichi.

A weird shadow reflected itself upon a corner in his mind.

"Yeah...I don't quite understand too, so let's get back to what we're talking about...Umm, but where should we get back to? Or should I say we hadn't gotten anywhere from the start!"

"So...Nagase, you want to have a talk with me, right? You said at the start something like 'tell me'...so, what actually was that?"

"Mmm...I-If that's what it is, then you also have something to tell me. What is it?"

"I...I was..."

Taichi tried to think back the time when his body heated up, his body moved against his will, he felt he wasn't himself anymore, and some foreign feeling pushed him; and at the same time focused on that foreign feeling.

He had lost count of how many times silence had fallen. After that, the both of them commenced at the same time.

"Our confession then..."

"Our confession then..."

"Ah!"

"Ah!"

Not only were their words the same, but also their reactions.

"Eh...Tai-Taichi, you also wanted to say the same thing."

"Y-Yeah...I had felt from that time that I need a distinct confirmation...but after that everything went so crazy I had not the chance to do it."

In the personality exchange, their hearts had once connected to each other. Taichi would definitely not take what happened then as a lie.

Yet, what happened then was too unrealistic. They looked as if characters in a film.

So, was the confession that they both proposed they liked each other irrational as it occurred in this extreme situation? Was it some kind of misattribution effect^[3]? He was like one of the protagonists of films who one often want to say to them, 'now isn't the time for this type of thinking', Taichi thought.

Besides, for the memories back then was so great, he felt if his usual life weren't taken with care he would contaminate his memories.

"Starting from then on!"

Nagase spoke too vibrantly she couldn't keep the decibels of the sound down, so she quickly lowered her voice afterward.

"...Have your feelings...not yet changed?"

It was Nagase who took courage first.

Taichi fell into self-disgust slightly, but then he quickly changed his way of looking at it: if he had the time to be dismayed, he should have time to step forward and spoke what he should distinctly.

"Not even a bit. My feelings for you haven't changed since then."

Both of them said they liked each other.

Nevertheless, they were not in a relationship.

"Is that so...about that...me...me too."

Their conversation paused.

But unlike before, the silence this time did not bother him, but comforted him. No. It was more than comfort, it was—

"...Err...To tell the truth.....I'm extremely embarrassed right now."

"...Me too...quite a bit."

Perhaps it was their reluctance in such moments that kept their relationship from progressing.

"Le-Let's stop for today! It just feels...Yeah, that's what we'll do!"

"Y-Yeah, that's a good idea!"

Even though he knew that he was acting like a coward, Taichi couldn't do anything about it.

"Sorry for such a strange phone call! Bye~ Bye!"

"Eh? Hey. Naga—"

Not waiting for Taichi to reply, Nagase had already hung up the phone.

Taichi could only close his phone helplessly.

The things that happened today and the problem he had with Nagase were still left in his mind.

Taichi roared, "Yeah~" while scratching his head.

At this moment he suddenly noticed someone looking at him.

He turned his head to the door and saw a small head coming out.

It was a head that was covered with wavy medium-to-long hair and had naive, pure, and large round eyes.

It was his sister, a five-grader, who carried a notebook in front of her chest which was written with a large word: 'maths' on it. The door that she half-opened screeched a sound like it was staring closely at Taichi.

"Wh-When did you start watching?"

"Eh, when your phone rang and you jumped up and dropped your phone. Ah, I also saw slightly the place where you stared at your phone numbly."

"You almost saw everything, damnit!"

Having her sister that was five years younger than him to see his doing strange things, he, as the elder brother...his dignity would...

"Nya, bro, was the person you just talked to on the phone...your girlfriend?"

"No. No. She's not my girlfriend!"

For no apparent reason, Taichi's tone sounded like he was acting in a Jidaigeki^[4].

"You're embarrassed~ My brother is so cute~"

"Stop scoffing at elders! Wait. Stop. That doesn't count."

This won't work. I am too jittery. Taichi breathed deeply to calm himself down. And his sister couldn't stop laughing at this scene.

"He! But now I'm relieved. There was a time when you were very strange and I thought you had better go to the hospital to see the doctor..."

That time should be the time when the personality exchange occurred among the five members of the Literature Club.

"—So it was purely lovesickness."

It looked like he was mistaken very seriously.

"Hey! You should stop be like recent teenage girls who take love into account of everything they think of! And where did you learn the word 'lovesickness' from?"

"Ahaha. What are 'recent teenage girls'? You speak like an old man!"

"O-Old man! If it's a middle-aged man I'll still be fine."

Taichi was a bit shocked.

"But, if this is the case, then if anything strange happens in you from now on, I'll tell mum and dad that 'this is just lovesickness; it's enough to care for him behind.'"

"I-I don't need your meddling in my business!"

My parents actually had those kinds of family meetings with my sister. That sure was annoying.

"But honestly I'm now assured I can have boyfriend now. So, that's all. I have a lot of things I don't understand in my homework. Teach me please, bro."

"H-Hold on for a moment! It's too early for you to have a boyfriend! Listen well. You'll have to discuss with me in detail about this."

"Yes. I'll listen to you after you help me to look at this question."

"I-It's decided! If there's any progress on that, please inform me immediately!"

Taichi was so messed up by his precocious sister recent behaviour. He then tutored her in her homework, had dinner, watched the television, bathed—finishing his daily schedule as usual.

At some unknown time the club members had already lost their sense of impending crisis to the aberrant things that happened among them today.

The situation was a bit not right, but it wasn't a personality exchange.

So Taichi thought in his heart that there wasn't a need to care for this not-so-important problem.

No. He wanted more to merely believe in it than think of it logically.

However, this was an acute mistake he made.

—On the next morning, Kiriya Yui and Aoki Yoshifumi were taken to the police office to receive counselling.

Chapter 2 - By the Time We Realized It, It Had Already Begun (II)

On the next morning, Yaegashi Taichi walked to school with immensely heavy steps.

To think that he would meet Nagase Iori was very embarrassing. However, more embarrassing was to meet Inaba Himeko: what would Inaba's face tell me when she comes to school? To make it short, he told himself to abstain from looking at her breast...what a waste of my brainpower for these trivial things, he thought.

"Things are getting bad. Yui and Aoki have been brought to the police office for counselling."

As Taichi went into the classroom, Inaba blurted to him with a wan face.

Police office. Counselling.

Was it because he didn't want to have any meddling with business that would relate with these terms? Taichi couldn't understand immediately what Inaba had said.

"Uh? No, Wait. What was that? Or should I first ask, Yui and Aoki...are you referring to Kiriya Yui and Aoki Yoshifumi?"

"Who else would I be referring? You idiot. Come here first."

Inaba pulled Taichi to her seat.

Iori, at a loss, was sitting there, mumbling words like a fly, "What could we do..."

"Why...What's going on? What was that counselling?"

"How would I know?! The only thing we know now was that this have become the talk of the day in the staff room."

"For real...have you contacted them?"

"No...I failed."

Nagase said, holding on her phone.

"Oh...Dammit. Does anyone know what happened..."

"Are you calling for me?"

Surprised, Taichi turned his head to the unexpected reply.

The registered trademark she had was the bundled hair at her back that revealed her forehead and the glimmering glasses.

Originally she was the model student that everyone could imagine. But for no apparent reason she stepped upwards to becoming someone even more powerful and impacting with her superb leadership skills. Allegedly she was the person to answer many love problems of students in the same grade. She was the class president of class 1C, Maiko Fujishima. On a side note, according to Fujishima, she was trying to say 'thanks to you guys (Taichi and the literature club members) for awakening my powers. You have opened a great door with huge and abysmal potential. Be gratified.', though, they didn't quite understand what she meant.

"Um...Okay. No one called for you, Fujishima-san."

Iori said with a bit of fear. Fujishima seemed to have done something to her that caused her to be inapt at dealing with her. By the way, what Fujishima said about this was somewhat like 'I have my own ideals to pursue. Rest assured—you're not the first in my priority list.', though, it was uncertain where was Iori numbered in her list.

"Nyahh. Didn't you want to know what happened to Kiri-yama-san and Aoki-san?"

"What do you know, Fujishima? Spurt it out!"

"It isn't quite right to use a demanding tone when requesting things, Inaba-san."

"Mmm...then please tell me...Fujishima-san."

Maiko was totally unfaltered even when confronting someone as adamant as Inaba. She even exuded an atmosphere even more scheming than her, which was horrendous.

"Yes. If you're willing to lend Iori-san to me for two hours, I'll consider."

"Wuagh?"

Iori squeaked a sound she hadn't made before and jumped up.

"Th-the deal is a bit...aghahaha..."

"Isn't it great? I think Iori-san will be glad to do so."

Fujishima wriggled her hand ominously as if it was a tentacle.

"Hey, Fujishima! Isn't it too despicable of you to do that?!"

Taichi shouted. And at this moment,

[Don't touch her!]

The sound reverberated in his head again.

Taichi's body gained heat in a rapid rate.

Shit. Gradually his body seemed to have left him, though, his consciousness was still here.

This condition was exactly the same as yesterday. Along with his boiling mood, what could happen now?

What did he want to do?

Stop!

Though he cried in his heart, he couldn't stop himself.

Taichi went one step forward to Fujishima and lifted his hand.

Was this a dream? What was I doing?

Taichi knew what he was doing, but another force inside him had taken over his control.

No!

Just as Taichi was about to swing his right hand towards Fujishima, Inaba grabbed his arm tightly.

"What do you want to do?"

Inaba looked at Taichi, penetrating him with her cold eyes, and held his wrist potently with one hand. His arm felt as if it was going to go wild.

He had consciousness, but he still shook off Inaba's hand crudely.

Nevertheless, Inaba, with a face tensed and full of nervousness, still tried to get a grip of his hand,

Fretful, Taichi took out his wrist with all his strength.

Then, Taichi suddenly stopped his actions.

The warmth in him cooled off, and the power that was controlling him had left him.

Taichi felt a bit of uneasiness and dismayed.

Inaba stared at him quietly.

"...What are you doing, Yaegashi-san? Practicing for a dance?"

Fujishima asked plainly.

"No...that's..."

Cold sweat incessantly slid down his face, causing a mess in his brain, making him unable to think.

"So, how's the deal? Nagase-san."

"You're still talking about that..."

Taichi couldn't stick to an adamant attitude, feeling a bit pressured and timid at the middle of his words.

"No. That's fine. Taichi...If only we can know what happened to Yui and Aoki...Mmm...Right. I understand! Be it two hours or three, I'll do everything for you! So, please tell us what happened to Yui and Aoki, Fujishima!"

"I lied. Whether or not you do it, I'll certainly tell you."

Iori lapsed on the table immediately.

"You...lied? I shouldn't have decided so quick..."

"Don't pick these times to pull out such weird lies, Fujishima!"

Taichi also retorted. He adamantly pushed the scary and impulsive emotions that came over him to a side in his brain, trying to forget it as soon as possible.

"Nyaaa. This is my style of expressing humour. Hadn't you guys received my intention?"

"Please at least look less serious when you're going to lie."

Iori stuck her face on the table.

"You were having such dismayed faces, I just wanted to relieve the tense atmosphere...I couldn't believe you were so rejective..."

Fujishima looked down with sorrow. It looked like Fujishima was also brought up by living parents.

"So, what do you know, Fujishima? Please tell us."

Inaba directly entered the topic.

"Ahah...Yes. Then let me explain this in chronological order. Though I'm unsure of the reason, some female students of our school were annoyed by a few rogue students from Aki High at the central station. It was a clear morning, there were a lot of passers-by, and their quarrel stayed for quite a long time. Just when the people around them felt the urge to call the officers

to come and deal with their problem, their saviour rushed in in a flurry and taught those rogues a harsh lesson."

"Could that hero be..."

Iori mumbled.

"Yes. She was Kiriya Yui, a member of your club."

Kiriya taught those rogues a lesson?

"Umm...the so-called rogues should be boys, right?"

Taichi asked.

"Though I must be impressed that you had the sense of equity that rogues didn't have to be boys, but according to what I have just said before, isn't it rare that rogues are females? Yes. The rogues that Kiriya taught a lesson to were boys."

Kiriya taught some boys a lesson?

Kiriya, who has acute androphobia that would tremble when touching boys, would teach boys a lesson?

Though this symptom has been alleviated a bit recently, but she couldn't be capable of doing that yet.

"Then?"

With a tensed face, Inaba hurried Fujishima to continue.

"If that was only what she did, then it was something encouraging...but Kiriya-san seemed to have overdone it. As a result, a few students from Aki

High joined to see what clamour had been aroused...but it seemed that six of them were beaten to the floor by Kiriyaama-san."

An angry and savage Kiriyaama appeared in Taichi's imagination.

"Though we couldn't say she had done wrong, but that was over the line. So Kiriyaama-san was brought to the police office for inquiry of the line of events...Ah...so you thought she was arrested because you heard of the word 'counselling', right? Actions that police take towards juveniles are usually referred as 'counselling'. This is common sense! After that, another person appeared that interrupted the clamour that originally should be settled."

"Was it Aoki?"

Inaba swiftly asked.

"Right. though Aoki wasn't certain of what happened, he seemed very agitated by the fact that the police took away Kiriyaama. He kept on shouting, 'Where do you want to bring her to! Let her go! Give her back!' Is he the kind that couldn't calm down and think of the facts when he gets turned on? Anyways, for this cause did the police brought Aoki together to the police office."

Although Aoki was a dumb character, he definitely wouldn't employ violence to deal with things. On top of that, he was that kind of person who would act with a peace of mind when conditions get rough.

"Nevertheless, don't be too worried. I think everything's going to work out. After all, Kiriyaama-san and Aoki-san had no malicious intent. At the worst they would only be severely warned. And the school wouldn't punish them as their actions were based on the urge to safeguard the students in the school. Or

may I say that KiriYama-san was rated with a pretty high value due to this episode, so if they were to punish her, a lot of students would surely seriously be dissentious. And the most important thing is..."

Fujishima stopped and looked at Inaba, leaving her words hanging with an inexplicable flavour.

"I wouldn't let such things happen. Whatever tactics I should employ, I would surely drag her out."

Inaba lifted her lips to a corner, showing a plain and reassured smile.

"I knew it. Even if things really get into that state, I would give my all to help. Hahaha!"

Even if we look at the whole picture, the school, these two girls were categorized into the more capable people. It was in fact a bit eerie to see them look at each other, smiling.

"Right. There's something I'm quite curious. Fujishima, where do you get all this information from? Do you know any spectators? These information seem to be correct most of the time," Inaba asked.

"No. My father is a policeman with somewhat high rank. That's about it. Ahaha, if there's anything that might happen, I could help to say something."

Fujishima said such shocking words plainly. It was certainly shocking to know of her father's stance, but to know that Fujishima could exploit her father's power was even more petrifying.

"Hehe...What good news. You can be of good worth."

Inaba had an evil smile of a dishonest businessman.

"I'm fine if the requests fall into rational and right cases. Of course I would need an equivalent payment for the deal. But if it was Inaba I think I can offer a discount."

"Then we'll sure be thankful."

Hahaha...The two laughed at each other again, exuding an abominable atmosphere that anyone could not interfere, an atmosphere even mixed with some sinister and ominous feeling.

At this moment, the bell for the lessons rang.

At the recess time after the first lesson, Taichi walked to Inaba's seat.

"Inaba, thanks a bunch right there."

Crossing her arms, Inaba slightly opened her eyes,

"Thanks for what?"

"...Didn't you stop me this morning?"

Taichi couldn't say it clear what it was. If he was to say it, he would have to admit what he originally wanted to do.

How can he admit having such impulsive and rash thoughts?

"Didn't you hear a sound in your mind...some kind of [sound]?"

Having been told by Inaba, Taichi couldn't help but gulp.

She was right. Taichi did hear the [sound]. The [sound] was what opened the door that let an eerie impulse take over his body momentarily and cause him to move against his own will.

The power of that impulse had obviously superseded the level where you would evade from a flying ball heading towards you.

"Yeah...Right. But how did you know my mind heard that [sound]? Did you hear that sound too, Inaba?"

"No, I didn't. Didn't I ask you whether you heard the sound? Although I didn't hear the sound at that moment, I did in some other time in similar situations."

"Inaba...you have also experienced this? After hearing that [sound], one would take actions against one's will..."

Before Taichi finished, Inaba had already nodded her assent.

They could already confirm something had happened.

Had they been gradually rejected from the 'normal' world?

A sense of premonition ran across their minds.

Inaba heaved a sigh.

"We don't know the details yet. Maybe it's just an overreaction...Still, be ready for anything that might happen."

Inaba's tone was very heavy.

"I understand."

"So let's meet at the club and talk over it. I hope that Yui and Aoki could also come to school before school ends. If they didn't, then let's see by then...Hmmp. How rare that I would hope that everything was just my own worrying."

"Yeah..."

"What we are left to do now is to pray, I think."

For they hadn't quite grasped the situation they're in, her words don't quite fit the creed of her, the creed that every challenge must be overcome by one's power.



The episode occurred all of a sudden.

No. There had been something wrong that happened before that.

If I take this something, an omen, into account, then this episode should feel less sudden.

However, there was no omen before this omen, and thus this omen was everything I could depend on.

No matter how I put it, this way was too despicable.

In this way, there was no way they could be able to prevent it.

Had they escaped from this kind of world yet?

No. It wasn't a problem about escaping or not as they didn't have the right to decide.

Was being played around all they could do?

Was being fooled all they could do?

Was this their fate?

Was this the story they're in?

Taichi knew that this was all he, an insignificant person, could think.

"Ahah...I am «Heartseed». It doesn't really matter if I say it or not...Do you agree?" Gotou Ryuusen, the class teacher of class 1C and the advisor of the literature club, said in the literature clubroom, located in the fourth floor of the recreational building.

"So everyone...it's been ages we've meet...maybe not...What do you think?"

He, with still the dull face of a dead man he used to be, spoke in front of Taichi and the other club members, without paying heed to what they would think.

They met again three weeks after Nagase Iori was almost forced to die.

Some time had passed after that incident, yet it was too fresh to put it as something that happened in the past.

Was it too early or too late?

The only thing Taichi was sure of was that he didn't want to meet him.

"I really don't want to meet the indestructible you, «Heartseed»."

Inaba spoke in a provoking and still manner to that person, or maybe not a person at all. From her tone one could know that she really didn't want to see him again.

In the end, Kiriya and Aoki didn't go to school.

There were no official announcements or punishments, but their families were still notified of the incident. (The information came from Fujishima.)

Taichi, Iori, and Inaba reckoned that they could do nothing about the fact that they didn't come, so they still decided to gather in the club after school. The thing was that...

«Heartseed» appeared at this time.

Same as before, he appeared in Gotou's body.

Only one step forward they take might get them to the destination they want.

Taichi and Iori stood up to face against «Heartseed». Only Inaba was still sitting, without making a gesture.

"Why are you appearing in front of us again? Didn't you say we should forget about you and the matters derived?"

"Ahah...Maybe I did say that...Actually what I was hoping for was that you shouldn't take much concern of that. But I remembered faintly the moment we last saw that I said 'so, see you later'...right? Inaba-san with transcending memory powers..."

"Don't be silly. You bastard!"

Inaba punched hardly on the table that was moved here yesterday.

«Heartseed».

He was the presence that evoked the random personality exchange and self-proclaimed that he was constantly observing them in the phenomenon, doing whatever he wanted.

Who he was still remained unknown.

And there were no way he was going to tell them.

"Why are you coming again? I don't want to see you even for a bit."

Iori tried to stay clam, though, she couldn't suppress her tense and nervous tone in her speech. The person who most likely have sophisticated and mixed feelings toward «Heartseed» was Iori. After all, she might have already been dead if they had made a little mistake.

"Ahah...Speaking of which, I haven't directly apologised to Iori-san...About that incident...I feel sorry from the depths of my heart...really...sorry."

"Even if you apologise to me now...it won't...Wuah! So, if you really feel sorry about that, then please leave us alone!"

She was right, Taichi thought.

"No...I've repeated myself a few times...You guys are really interesting...Also, you can be angry at the fact that I've chosen you for this experiment...but please don't get angry at me...for I really want to get along well with you guys..."

What he said was a bit—no, very dangerous.

"Wait! What happened to what you said about 'let's be good friends forever'?"

Inaba cried, panicking.

"Ahah...That is...because I'm going to do something interesting again this time...so even though I don't know what will happen later...I think it feels pretty good to say that, regardless of what happens later, doesn't it?"

"Hey. What do you mean by something interesting?"

Taichi's voice trembled.

"How strange...Didn't you notice, Yaegashi-san? Don't you feel that sometimes sounds will pop in your mind, and your body will take actions against your will?"

A streak of coldness invaded his body.

He was in the all-so-familiar clubroom, yet he felt he was pulled into another world.

"What are you spewing! You bastard! Do you mean...you're planning to directly control our bodies?"

Inaba roared in rage.

"Manipulate? What are you talking about...Inaba-san. How can I do such things...and that would be pointless...Fu...then let me explain this while I'm here to do the forecast...Ahah...how kindhearted I am."

"What do you mean by forecast and the explanation..."

Iori said, trembling.

"Nyaa...If I don't explain it, won't it be a headache for you? Ahah...Though it may be interesting to see you get frustrated...I don't want to adopt that method now...what I mean by forecast is that...I'll do an official explanation when everyone's here...all of the five club members...that's it."

"Why...would you find us again..."

Iori mumbled in a husky voice. Though being hard in her words, she had probably given in.

"Ayahh, how many times do I have to say 'this is because you are very interesting'...Ahah...I'm starting to get tired of this way of putting it...Do I really have to explain things beforehand...but it feels that I would waste this chance of coming here if I don't do it...Ahah...a more important thing is that thinking of these things just troubles me...What do you think I should do? I can let you guys be the judge."

"Let us hear what you're going to say...We'll decide after that."

Having calmed herself down slightly, Inaba pushed her hair upwards and said.

"Ahah...Thanks. Then let me explain it; however, this time it isn't anything special...or maybe I may think that everyone would feel happy for this...Ahah...perhaps this is exaggerating it...Eh. Where was I? Ahah...So, to put it short, this is to let the 'desires' in your hearts, the true expectations, to be unleashed...that's about it."

"Unleashing our...desires?"

As he mumbled the words out, all the aberrant behaviour he and the other club members had yesterday and today floated in his mind.

Inaba who pushed him down.

Kiryama who was extraordinarily furious.

Iori who phoned him with a weird attitude.

And he was bound by a sudden impulse.

"Yes...Unleashing your desires...or in short,'desire unleash'...hmm? Maybe I didn't really shorten it. Whatever...Eh, it is inevitable that humans have a lot of 'desires'...you have them, do you? But not all of those desires come out or

taken as actions, for our consciousness or other mental blockages will cease them...however, don't you think this is a bit lamentable?"

«Heartseed» continued, without paying heed to their reactions, even though he did use an interrogatory sentence to end his line.

"You want to do it but you can't...Is it appropriate for a human being to live a life with so many restrictions? Ahah...this sounds fairly like philosophy."

"What an idiot. How can man live doing whatever they want."

Inaba interrupted and despised him.

"Yeah...That's right in normal terms...so maybe if we turn the tables around something interesting might happen."

«Heartseed»'s tone was devoid of weight, as if his words could be blown away by a light wind.

"I just want to slightly...unleash your 'desires', and let you acquire freedom...that's it."

To acquire freedom by unleashing desires.

"Isn't that beyond dangerous? If one were to have one's desires unleashed and act according to what one wants, then one couldn't be counted as a human being. That's...bestly."

How preposterous, said Inaba at the end.

"Ahah...Inaba-san, you sure get the gist of things...You're right, who knows what will happen if all the desires of humans are unleashed...So, if we unleash different desires...and desires are multifaceted, for example: food desires, sex

desires, sleep desires, worldly desires, power desires, fame desires...What desires are out there? I couldn't come up with any good examples. In brief, I would devise it such that only some desires are randomly unleashed."

«Heartseed» had on his face a bored expression all along his speech.

"Ah. But the 'desires' unleashed are usually the strongest desire at the time...After all, desires undergo changes frequently and their stages differ greatly."

How dumb, Taichi thought. He couldn't make up a voice as he was completely stunned.

"That's it...You ought to know what you should do, don't you? I'll assume you do."

«Heartseed», having Gotou's appearance, fell silent.

"...I actually want to explain it a bit more...but as this is after all a forecast, this should be enough. And there's two absent today...Ahah...Then I'll stop right here. Let me make an official explanation when all of you are here, and of course see if I'm available at that time. Please tell those two absent what I've said just now. What a pain."

"What were you blurting just now? What do you want to do? Be exact and clear!"

Inaba was enraged by the way «Heartseed» had been holding them in suspense.

"Ahah...Is that it? Then I'll return now...Let's meet again after school tomorrow."

"This isn't even an answer!"

Inaba began to feel irascible; others beside her began to mumble nonsense.

"Tomorrow...after school?"

"Yeah...I said today's the forecast, you see? Actually I wanted to explain everything today...but it seems that there has been two absent...so let's postpone it till tomorrow...This was what I planned...but to be certain that my plans will be interrupted just makes me feel bad...so I've come at last...one thing I was certain was that things would be better if I come here beforehand."

"Wasn't that due to that 'desire unleash' you caused?"

Inaba said with surprising vigour.

"Not exactly...However, if I just leave you guys alone without any notice...maybe this will 'end'...so I've come...though, ending it wouldn't be much of a hassle, I would feel bad if it ended too quickly...Hmm, if I put it like this way, I should have notified you a lot earlier...but observing you, who felt completely puzzled of the episode, was fairly interesting..."

'Observing' and 'interesting'—the way this guy plans something had the same rules; still, it was troubling to understand what he meant by 'observing' and 'interesting'.

"...Farewell then."

«Heartseed» mumbled, left for the door, but then stopped abruptly.

"Nyaa? Having given it a deep thought, I think...maybe I can't make sure what I've said could be told to those two...but about this, I think you're going to do

it for me...you should have remembered what I have said I think. Inaba-san, I'm giving my hopes on you...."

Inaba deadily eyed at «Heartseed» and remained silent. They both stared at each other, shaping a warped space that neither Taichi nor Iori could enter.

Inaba then clenched her first, commencing,

"If I say...I reject?"

"Then that'll surely be a headache...for you guys, that is."

"Wouldn't you get a headache too?"

Inaba tried to make a deal with «Heartseed», but where did she find power left to do that?

Nevertheless, compared to Inaba's sullen face, «Heartseed» still kept his poker face.

"Ahah...Why should you be so mischievous...To tell the truth, I don't have any more strength to go find the two and explain to them...Ahah...as such, then let me first stop this for a while..."

"What are you saying actually?"

"So...I'll stop this from now on till tomorrow, so your desires won't be unleashed...What a great offer I'm giving you..."

"Uh...What the hell are you saying..."

Iori's voice felt as if she was at the verge of tears.

"Not anything special...so before I explain tomorrow, I'll first pause this phenomenon. This is some time for you to have a rest...break point...Ahah...I don't know how to put it...this is, after all, not something very important..."

"You're even capable...of doing that?"

Inaba wore a tight, forced smile.

"Perhaps...Maybe it's a bit too much for this side if I do this...but it's much better than putting it to an 'end' immediately...and more importantly...thinking it from another perspective...having a situation like this might be interesting. So, let's meet again here tomorrow...though things might alter then...see you."

Having finished all his blabber, «Heartseed» left the clubroom.

No one attempted to stop him.

To be more precise, they couldn't.

Silence invaded the clubroom after he had left.

"...It's back again?"

As Inaba started to mumble, sounds once again fell upon the room.

Taichi and Iori still couldn't make a sound.

Taichi couldn't even think up of what to do or how to react.

He had always had in his heart that aberrant phenomena such as personality exchanges would never occur among them ever again.

Nevertheless, there was some possibility. Or even, for they had once gone through such things, the possibility of meeting them would even be higher.

The existence named «Heartseed», who surpassed normality, seemed to have preyed on them.

"Why...Why..."

Iori's voice seemed to be sounded in her subconscious.

The same question was darting through Taichi's mind.

He pondered over how he could evade from such things, yet he was shocked that this was totally impossible.

"Ah. Does anyone know of a way to prevent such a bastard situation from occurring?"

Taichi and Iori were unable to answer Inaba's question.

When they were engaged in the 'personality exchange', though everyone endeavoured to think up of different solutions, they failed to make conclusions of a feasible solution. Under circumstances where no new hints were given, there was simply no way to save them.

"So, should we just give up and give in?"

Iori mumbled.

"What else could we do? Can we do something to solve it? I've been thinking of this and I would still think of this, but speculating from the current status quo..."

Both Iori and Inaba had a sullen face.

Taichi was also depressed, yet he knew he had to say something.

"We've made it through last time, so I believe this time we'll make it through too. Things will mend together at last, you see?"

Taichi felt that what he said lacks something to back up, seemingly very unpersuasive.

He tried to say something else in a flurry.

"Maybe not...then let's think up of a way! Though I think we can't be too optimistic about this, being so dejected couldn't help a thing...Ah, didn't we say we should take this optimistically?..."

Just when Taichi couldn't make up his mind on what to say, Iori and Inaba laughed at and for the same instant.

"D-Don't laugh at me together."

"Though what you're trying to do is a good thing, but you always do it so stubbornly—is it because you are a big idiot?"

"If you can say it much more decisively, you'll look much cooler."

"...Saying it like this won't help anything."

"Whatever. Forget it. That guy seems to have something to say tomorrow after all; besides, he said he'll stop this for the time being...maybe you're right, all we could do now is just to let things mend together."

Crossing her arms, Inaba heaved a sigh.

"That guy will come again tomorrow...Let's wait until then. Knowing that he'll come, I really want to set him up."

Iori said jokingly.

"Should we put a blackboard eraser on top of the door?"

Three of them laughed at Inaba's suggestion.

Such little jokes rejuvenated them.

"Well, let's wait until tomorrow then. I'll tell Yui and Aoki what happened. It seems that nothing special will happen today, so let's go back home and get some rest for tomorrow...though I don't want to put it like this, for I sound like I really want tomorrow to come."

That being said, the club members were dismissed and returned their homes.

On that night, Taichi had trouble sleeping.



It was on the next day.

As expected of many, Kiriya and Aoki didn't receive any punishment.

During the recess period after the first lesson, Taichi, Iori, and Inaba met Aoki while walking along the corridor.

Tired and stressed he was, he still seemed to be more energetic than most of them.

"Sorry for having you to worry about me."

Aoki lowered his head in apology.

"There's no need to apologise: we didn't worry about you at the first place."

"That's too bad of you, Inaba!"

In some sense, Aoki should be counted as a soldier coming back from the battlefield, yet Inaba had no sign of greeting him the way he deserved.

"However, I can feel the love of Inaba when she intentionally greets me the same way as before!"

"Wuahh...even I'm going to puke at this extremity of optimism."

Iori was taken so aback she leaned backwards all the way.

So positive was Aoki's thinking that it surely was idiotic to worry about him. Besides, maybe there is something to learn from him of his optimism.

"Nevermind. Are you fine?"

There were a lot of implications in Taichi's question.

"Yeah. I'm fine. Thanks! There isn't anything to be proud of that happened."

Aoki smiled with glee.

The situation they're in was obviously harsh: there was no saying what «Heartseed» was up to. Still, Aoki accepted them joyfully and acted staunchly. Inaba told him yesterday through the phone what had happened, yet he still chose this optimistic attitude to confront it.

Taichi, in his heart, praised him for this indomitable will: this was something he couldn't do himself.

Aoki, however, said sullenly,

"The thing that worries me the most is Yui."

A dark wave of sadness and melancholy propagated through everyone's face.

Kiriyama hadn't gone to school today.



Just as he promised, «Heartseed» went to the clubroom after school.

He again appeared as Gotou, the class teacher of class 1C and the adviser of the club.

Except for Kiriyama, all the club members were now face to face with him.

They knew he was coming, though, they couldn't adopt any measures other than getting ready for it.

"Ahah...So Kiriyama-san still didn't show up today...however...I don't plan to wait any longer...I can't help it...so please help her after I explain this to you...how deplorable is it that I can't officially explain to all five of you...Eh, do you remember what I had said yesterday? I'm feeling that I've already said most of it...haven't I? Inaba-san with such a transcending memory ability."

Inaba furrowed her eyebrows in disgust of him.

Nevertheless, she immediately got tensed and went face-to-face with «Heartseed» firmly.

"So what you've said was that you're going to unleash our strongest and greatest 'desires', right? Tsk...It isn't any tricks that have to do with our bodies

or souls, nor is it manipulating our bodies, but directly changing the nature of our souls to control us. How considerate of you."

"Ahah...So I've already explained...How great. But...controlling your souls? What a surprising way of saying that...Although what I'm going to do is a bit like messing with forbidden drugs, that won't twist your souls, so your desires won't be abnormally strengthened...if I really had to say it, your desires just flow out as you wish...Looking it from another angle, this might even help you to find your authentic self...After all, desires in your subconscious could also be unleashed..."

"Just going with the flow...my authentic self..." Inaba repeated to herself in a low voice.

"How should I put it...It is like giving absolute power to the desires that are wanted to be unleashed, power that completely supercede that of your own determination...Let me repeat this: this isn't messing around with the root of your heart or desires; they're all what you want."

"Let me tell you: this isn't a joke. If we're angry at somebody so badly we want to kill them, will we really do it if the that desire gets unleashed?"

Killing somebody.

Taichi felt from Inaba's words an abominable feeling he had never experienced.

Ultimately, would that really happen?

Even with such demanding tone, «Heartseed» still stood still, saying what he had to,

"Hehe. So Inaba-san really wants to kill people that don't meet her eyes? How scary..."

"What are you saying..."

"Things will be as you really wish they would become...So, Inaba-san, you're really a person who can easily want to kill someone..."

"That's...just a metaphor. How would I...really think like that."

"Yeah...People who accumulate in their hearts the desire to kill others are rare..."

Inaba raised her fist, grinding her teeth in hate.

Even Inaba was brought away by «Heartseed»'s desired direction.

Although they knew he was coming, they still hadn't no way of stopping him.

"Ahah...I hate to be misunderstood, so let me first explain...I didn't mean that once your 'desires' are unleashed you will go on a rampage, neglecting everyone else around you...things will not happen if there isn't a true desire in your hearts..."

"Hey, are you referring to Yui?"

Aoki's voice was filled with anger.

"Ha? Who knows? What do you think?"

"Are you fooling us?"

Aoki shouted and stood up, but was stopped by Inaba. Then, Inaba continued, "though...whatever we might think, we can suppress ourselves from doing them by our rationality. Isn't this the correct behaviour of humans?"

«Heartseed» became silent and still for a while. One could not tell whether he was thinking by his still expressionless face.

"Who decides...those things?"

There shouldn't be anyone who decides that.

"...Humans are beings who want to kill someone long in their hearts, but always suppressed from carrying it out by their rationality...or should I say, even if one really want to kill someone, this kind of desire is only a wild thought, only a rare few would really want to kill someone...Which one is the right one? If it's the former, looks like it will really be a troublesome situation for you..."

This wasn't a situation that can just be described as troublesome.

Hadn't this deviated so much that it had become extremely dangerous?

Letting Taichi and the club members alone, maybe even such phenomenon would destroy the world outside the club.

"Nevertheless, we'll know when we try it..."

"Don't be a fool! We're not your guinea pigs!"

"Ahah...You're getting noisy, Inaba-san. If there isn't any way to save this...then just accept it willingly and do your best to get through it. I'll also do my best to observe. If this goes nicely, it'll stop one day..."

"Don't be a fool..."

Inaba repeated, but her voice was feeble this time, probably for she understood her efforts were futile.

"Ahah...Also, when your desires come rushing in...maybe you would hear in your mind 'a voice'...this could be said as the side effect of desire unleashing, the cries of your hearts, or of the sort. Please don't take too much mind of it. Ahah...I'm starting to get tired of speaking..."

«Heartseed» murmured.

"So after all this, I've said all the things I need to...I suppose...Forget it...Do you have any questions? It's rare that I'm available to answer your questions."

"...You won't activate the personality exchange phenomenon, will you?"

After a pause, Inaba asked.

Yes, maybe that would happen too.

"Yeah...No, for that has already ended."

"Hmph, yeah? You're still using Gotou's body, so that means you're still able to do that, don't you?"

As Inaba fought over with that supernatural existence, no one dared to interfere.

"Ahah...so this is what you're wondering. I'm using this body just for convenience. There are other ways, but this is the best."

«Heartseed» whacked his body, Gotou's body.

"How convenient do you make things for yourself...It seems like at this stage whatever we do we'll be unable to win against you."

"Yeah...I think it's the same for you to win against natural disasters..."

Natural disasters—perhaps this condition is similar to them.

"Moreover, though you say they are randomized, you can, in fact, manipulate them, right?"

"I can't...I don't think you would believe in me...so let's just take it that I can. But basically this is randomized. Please be assured...Ahah...looks like there isn't much to be assured about this."

"Ah...you bastard, you're so illogical! What a pain! What a pain! You can't even answer questions as basic as what person you are, yet you still say you accept any questions—what a pain!"

Inaba bit her nails, twisting her face as if reaching the zenith of hate and pain.

"I've repeated myself about this for many times...I hope you won't waste your time pondering over irrelevant things...All you need to do is to accept your fate and adopt measures to confront it...I'll be glad if you can do that, and I'm sure you'll be glad too...as we can end this much earlier."

"Final question."

"Go ahead, as I'm benevolent today..."

"Is shutting oneself in one's home violating the rules?"

Taichi didn't understand the point of this question, but from Inaba's tone he could tell that this question had an important significance.

There was an eerie smile on «Heartseed»'s face, so eerie it gave one the creeps.

"Hmm...You're quite sharp...Though I shouldn't answer this question, let me do it to express my gratitude..."

They seem to be having a conversion so sophisticated Taichi couldn't catch up with them.

"That would be quite interesting. If there's a need, I'll make it even more interesting...This answer is quite enough, I guess..."

"...Hmmpf, what a nasty personality you have."

Crossing her hands, Inaba casted a despising sentence.

"Whatever you say, for I'm that kind of existence...Is that enough? I've got to get going. Ahah...I even worked for two days in a row...maybe I've also grown, don't you reckon? Ahah...that's useless to ask you anyway. So, it's decided: I'll activate the 'desire unleash' once again I leave this place..."

Activating it once again.

Now was the only time to stop him.

"Hey, wait!"

At the last moment, Taichi shot a voice he had long heard.

"...What's the matter, Yaegashi-san? I don't think there's a problem."

That semi-opened turbid eyes shot right through Taichi, eyes that hadn't any colours.

As if standing in a desolate place, a strong, inconceivable sense of weight pressured on Taichi.

His mind couldn't work nimbly as it should, and he couldn't find the words he needed to say.

"Ahah...If this is the case, I'll go back then."

All the club members could do to this selfish tyrant, who only does things for his own convenience, was to see him off.

Nevertheless, Inaba left a word before «Heartseed» left the door of the clubroom.

"Many raise their hands in defeat when natural disasters fell upon them; however, if you were to presume that everyone in this world would do that, you're damn wrong!"

Smiling, Inaba raised her middle finger towards him.

"...I know...So, do your best."

The clubroom door closed with a bang.



The club members sat around the long table, leaning on their fold chairs all the way.

After «Heartseed» had left the clubroom, a kind of dreariness after a vehement, sweeping storm invaded the atmosphere.

They had to think up of a way, though, they didn't know where to begin.

And the most appalling thing was that this wasn't the end but the start.

From now on, the club members had to endure this phenomenon, which no one knew when it would end.

Taichi asked himself whether he was capable of handling it.

Could he live in this disaster in the precondition that he won't hurt anyone, including himself?

He knew from the bottom of his heart it wasn't an easy task.

The room was silent and time flew mercilessly. Everyone had his or her own opinion on the matter.

"Tsk...That's all we could do even when we knew he would come?"

After a while, Inaba threw a word of regret.

"No...Wasn't that enough? Someone like me was led all along the way..."

Taichi remembered «Heartseed», who appeared as Gotou, as he murmured.

Taichi's heartbeat still remained quick; his body couldn't withstand the atmosphere evoked by that strange, non-earthling creature.

"...Though we agreed to let Inaba to take charge of the main attacker, it seems that as if things will just flow the same as now even if we didn't plan beforehand."

Iori smiled feebly.

"Yeah. I've also picked a weird timing to shoot. Sorry...When thing's get related to Yui, I just can't..."

Aoki also said with a lack of force.

"...then there's no way...now we are left with no choice but to willingly accept it."

Inaba's voice was dyed with some desperation.

"...Is that all we can do? Is there any way...we can solve this? It might be too late to say it now."

Iori mumbled.

No one was able to raise something constructive.

No matter whether it was yesterday or today, Taichi kept thinking of ways to evade from this phenomenon.

He had also thought whether he could solve the problem if he didn't come to school and hide in some place far away.

However, he couldn't put his thoughts into action.

After all, in the worst case, «Heartseed» might even take control over their bodies: if that happens, then where could they hide?

"...Taking the last phenomenon as an example, the duration is about a month...What we can do now is just to have some patience."

Inaba continued quietly, "I don't think that we can escape from his watch."

"So...we can only follow what he says?"

Aoki murmured lowly.

The atmosphere in the clubroom felt heavy.

"Then I'm all-out to meet this challenge."

Taichi said, attempting to lighten the atmosphere.

They had a grace period yesterday, and Taichi had been ready for today, though, there was nothing he had on his hands except for his determination, and almost collapsed.

Confronting it was the only way if there was no escape. Standing up and confronting it to minimize the damage dealt—this was what man could do when facing disasters.

Bam!

As if rejuvenating herself, Iori slapped her cheeks.

"Everybody, let's do our best!"

Ready, Iori threw a smile of will and determination; the others nodded their assent.

Everyone knew what he or she had to do.

"...So, let's see the facts."

Inaba was the one in control.

"About the phenomenon...that bastard just explained everything, so we don't have to dig further in it. I'll notify Yui of this later. The first thing I want to confirm is, what would actually happen in this phenomenon?"

"To take it simply, it was the clamour that Yui and Aoki had."

Iori said, glancing at Aoki occasionally.

"Hmm...I remember when I saw the police taking away Yui, I was thinking of 'please wait for a moment'...for I knew Yui isn't good at handling boys—she

was so scared when those men surrounded her...then I heard [a voice] in my head...then...I suddenly got all angry...I knew something was wrong though..."

That being said, Inaba continued, "...Yui was probably thinking that she needed to save the wretched girls even if she had to teach those guys a lesson through violence. And Aoki was thinking that he needed to save Yui from being taken away by the police even if he had to use violence towards the police. In general, they should be able to refrain themselves from acting like that..."

"But because of their 'desires' being unleashed, they couldn't stop themselves from doing so?"

Iori carried on with a question.

"Most likely...what you said...Sorry."

"No. I don't think you need to sorry for that."

"So, the reason why Yui got all so turned on was maybe she thought she needed to clarify the matters even if she had to take forcible manners such as tearing the table apart...or maybe she just got so furious."

Taichi said, looking at others to confirm whether his comprehension of things was correct. Inaba turned to him and nodded in agreement.

"Yeah. Maybe Yui was just trying to take forcible manners by breaking the table. Although my inference may be incorrect, we can take it like this if we took what that guy said in account."

"What do you mean?"

Taichi asked.

"It's like Yui didn't really want to teach us a lesson to force us to give her an answer; or maybe she didn't feel she had to take such serious actions to achieve her goal; or maybe she would even use violence on us if we don't give her an answer after that..."

"Oh, I understand now."

Taichi replied.

According to «Heartseed», 'desire unleashing' would semi-force their desires to be taken in action.

That was all it was.

"Ahah...Speaking of which, the reason why Inaba would push me down..."

"Kiiahhh!"

"Wuaghhhh!"

Inaba pinched Taichi's throat brutally.

"Cough, cough! That was painful...You..."

"Forget about that! Are you nuts? Don't be a fool! That's enough of you! Stop pouring salt on others' wounds! Forget it, now! Or should I punch you until you forget it!"

She wavered so hard her hair fluttered in unison. This was because of 'desire unleashing'...or maybe not.

"Right. I've almost forgot about something due to this chaos. Taichi! Please tell me more about it...Ah, it wouldn't be too good to say it here since Iori is also here..."

Though Aoki stopped in the middle, he knew it was too late.

"Eh, what actually was that...Inaba pushing you down?"

Iori cocked her head in surprise.

"Look. Now things got complicated! You idiot! Nuthead! Fool!"

"S-Sorry..."

Taichi lowered his head in guilt.

"If saying sorry could get over things, then there's no need for the police!"

"Ya, so what happened after all?"

"Mmm...D-don't tell others! Yesterday when I was alone with Taichi...I slightly knocked him over...that's it. However, only a little bit! When our bodies touched each other, Yui had already come in!"

At the end of her sentence, Inaba bit her tongue and made a silly sound, but Taichi didn't laugh and nodded his head vigorously, trying to help her out.

"Oh, Oh...that happened! So, why would Inaba become like that? And what did she originally plan to do? This question seems to be a bit irrational...sorry. There's no need to answer me!"

"Wait! For my reputation, I must first declare that I'm not that kind of women who are ready for sex any moment. I was just surfing the net and...saw some pornography."

Taichi, Iori, and Aoki couldn't respond. They tried to stay calm and put their eyes afar.

"W-What I originally planned to do...I don't know either! But I think I wouldn't do things that are too over the line...I don't have any experience in this after all."

Inaba's face reddened like an apple. Even the ones who looked at her had faces gradually turning red. Taichi told himself deep in heart greatly that he would never raise this topic ever again.

Iori and Aoki put up a stern face, and clasped their hands to prostrate.

They prayed keenly that Inaba's ill mannerism would be forever wiped away in their memories.

"Cough!"

Inaba cleared her throat, and the members sat upright and still.

"Let's get back to where we have been...In other words, when our desires get unleashed, the desire being taken into action depends on how strong you want that to happen. Some consciousness that hasn't been formed, that is, desires in our subconscious, may also be unleashed. This is really tricky."

"If they are things our consciousness can tell us, then we could at least predict what will happen when the desires are unleashed; however, if they come from our subconscious, then who knows what will happen...right?"

Iori rephrased what Inaba said and asked.

"Yes. Also, what am I about to say may only be my imagination, but I hope you can make note of it. What I have said meant that even stupid acts we would reject in our minds may be desires in our subconscious, which can be activated."

Inaba began to talk eloquently what she thought. How fast could she think?

"Mmm. I don't really understand what are desires in our subconscious, but I know this surely is dangerous. Just take a look at what I did at the station..."

"The desires deep down in my heart...my authentic desires...my authentic self..."

Iori mumbled as if chewing something.

"Nagase, I don't believe that your authentic self is the coalition of your most direct desires. Furthermore, to be honest, this is much trickier than personality exchanging."

Taichi continued after Inaba, "wasn't the personality exchange very tricky a thing already?"

"Taichi, come to think of it. Did we ever affect the outside world during that period?"

Staring at Taichi, Inaba continued, "I think you should understand. Look at it with a deeper thought, what were you planning to do to Fujishima yesterday morning?"

Inaba's words hit right at Taichi's wound.

When he heard [the voice], his body heated up and moved against his will.

Nasty sweat would still come out simply by just thinking of the terrible scene.

What he wanted was to take it as his misunderstanding, refusing to admit what he had experienced. He must have chosen to completely forget it if he were able to.

However, problems don't just get solved if he take no notice of it.

He really did almost do something bad and violent to Fujishima Maiko.

What was he thinking of doing originally? Did he want to push her away? Did he want to grab her by the collar? Taichi didn't know.

Nevertheless, the unpalatable truth was that he might have really hurt her.

This fact was heavier than anything in his mind.

A while later, the club members were discussing the measures they could take at present, with Inaba as the head to guide their discussion. As this was the second time they met such a phenomenon, the club members got used to what they're in much faster. But when they found out they had surprisingly got used to these atypical situations, a stream of chilliness went up their spines.

"...We have two measures on our hands now," Inaba commenced after a while of silence.

"Two?" Taichi asked. What had Inaba come up with?

"The first is to suppress with all your might the fluctuations of your emotions. The second is to do everything you want and have less reservation, hence having a livelier and freer life. Though I think we must employ both of them to make things work."

"What do you mean? Inaba," this time it was Aoki asking.

"This is just my interpretation of that bastards words—be them true or not!"

After a warning, Inaba continued, "the first measure is to use your own determination to suppress your feelings. To use an extreme example to explain it, it's like having 'nothing' (left) in your heart like a monk; then, nothing would happen when your desires get unleashed."

The situation we were dealing with was putting our thoughts into action, so we could say that we could cease them if we don't think of any.

However...

"But...isn't this too difficult? That guy once said that even the desires in our subconscious would get unleashed...I don't think I'm able to control my desires to that state."

Iori mumbled, furrowing her eyebrow.

"You're right. So there's another measure: satisfying all your desires instead of suppressing them. As such, we won't have anything we want to do when our desires get unleashed, given that these desires are already satisfied in the first place."

"...I understand. Though the two measures are completely antithetic to each other, both of them tries to minimize the desires in our hearts."

As Taichi said, Inaba nodded.

"That bastard once said that 'desires undergo changes frequently and their stages differ greatly', so we can infer that the desires he referred are not dreams we want to achieve in our lives but spontaneous impulses. In fact, we can only also infer that from the experiences we've had. That being the case, we can to some extent control our desires by paying more attention to what we're doing."

In utter darkness, Inaba flashed a ray of light, weak, yet reassuring.

"...Nevertheless, there are still some problems in our measures. In the first one, we have to suppress our desires, but over-suppressing might in turn exploding them out. In the second one, we have no way of satisfying all desires. Desires are unlimited. Humans go after new desires when old ones are satisfied. There would be no effect if that happens."

"Mmm...then what should we do?" Aoki asked in pain.

"To tell the truth, the answer is—I don't know too."

Even Inaba couldn't help it.

"However...if you don't mind trying my measures, you'll have to use them both at the same time. In other words, it is trying to do things you want, and beware of having too vigorous emotions. That balance is extremely difficult, I say."

"Eh, So that's it: to do things you want to, not paying too much attention to it, but paying attention to places you need to?" Taichi tried to say it in his own way.

"What you're coming up with is a bit rough...but you get the idea. Oh, and I now I finally know that Taichi likes to do things at his own will."

"No. I don't..."

...Really?

Inaba laughed in despise at Taichi, who was cocking his head in confusion.

"Perhaps 'doing things like you normally do so' is the key to preventing troubling things from happening. After all, you don't get explosions if you don't accumulate too much gasoline. If you were to be too aware of it, maybe you would think of weird stuff. This isn't really the problem though...Ah. No! We would go nowhere if we talk like this!"

"Don't worry. That's enough for our reference. Inaba, you're truly awesome! What an impeccable ability of analyzing things," Iori exclaimed.

Taichi totally agreed with her. In these atypical situations, Inaba was still able to remember clearly what «Heartseed» said and make optimum use of it. It was no exaggeration to say that Inaba lived by her name in collecting and analysing information.

"Praising me isn't helpful."

"I think the most important thing is to help each other out. When someone gets into a dangerous situation, others beside him can give him the support he needs."

"Exactly."

Tachi nodded in head in agreement with Aoki's suggestion.

"Yeah we can do that in class. I'm with Yui, and you guys are in the same class—isn't that great? Ah, I don't have any special meaning!"

"Good. This is a way too."

Inaba lowered her head like contemplating.

"Hmm? Inaba, don't you think this is a great idea? It is, in my opinion."

"No...this is a good idea. Helping others out sound good...at least I think so...right. Let's call it a day, as the time is pretty late. Let's take care of things later when they come to us."

That being said, everyone slowly packed his or her things to return home.

However they talked over the measures, they couldn't vanquish the discomfort in their hearts. As he was scared he would be alone after parting with everyone, Taichi deliberately packed his things slower.

"Yui should come back to school tomorrow. Let's see how things will roll then," Aoki said.

"Yeah. I don't know what to say, but everything is going to be fine if we cooperate and do our best. Yes. I'm honest."

Iori, who was hurt the most and wavered the most serious, yet got through it like nothing, smiled grudgingly. Her smile was a bit stiff and forced, but that tender smile told everyone to be assured that everything will be fine. It also motivated Taichi to step forward and face any challenges.

"Yeah. I'll also do my best if conditions permit."

Forever and ever to safeguard that smile of yours—though Taichi didn't say it out, he had such indomitable will.

"Thanks, Taichi. Take good care of Nagase."

For a moment, Taichi thought Inaba saw through him and scared his heart out.

"Okay, but it's not only Iori, everyone is included..."

Taichi was interrupted by Inaba.

"You'll only have to take care of things pertaining to Iori and you. Also, Aoki, I'll hand Yui to your care...Ah, you're not that dependable."

"What are you saying, Inaba! Don't belittle me. When I'm serious, who knows what I'm capable of doing!"

"What do you want to do to her?"

Taichi just felt like giving a sharp remark.

"By the way, Inaba, where's your schoolbag? Are you not leaving?"

Iori asked Inaba, the only person who hadn't stood up.

"Oh, because I have to hand in the edited 'Bunken News', though, I plan to check it out with everyone the day before yesterday."

It seemed she was right, but Taichi had completely forgotten about it.

"Ah, we didn't had any mood to care about these things..."

Iori seemed to have forgotten about it too.

"See? Because everyone didn't have the time to proofread it, I'll do it myself this time and hand it to Gotou. Any problems?"

"Good...but can I help you?"

"Add me in...Ah, but it looks like there is nothing I can help with. Perhaps I can go fetch some juice, Inaba?"

Inaba only waved her head to Taichi's and Aoki's good will.

"No thanks. I'll just have to turn some nails around and hand this out. You won't be helpful around. Today...or should I say starting from today, a lot of troublesome things will be in our way, so just go home already."

Inaba threw off a rare smile, pushing them away to hurry them out.

"Inaban...You look a bit strange. Is everything fine?"

"I don't need you to worry for me yet, Nagase."

The three left the clubroom like they were forced to.

Taichi turned back for a final check at things, only to see Inaba standing behind the closing door, waving her hand and wearing a smile.



Inaba leaned against the door on her back.

A hard, chilly feeling slowly spread throughout her back.

After a while of talk, Taichi, Nagase, and Aoki had walked away and left the clubroom.

Though she knew they had left, Inaba didn't do anything.

She counted in her heart.

One...two...three...four...five...six...seven...eight...nine...ten.

Having counted to ten, she slid on the wall with her back and slowly sat down on the floor.

"There shouldn't...be any loopholes..."

In the room herself, Inaba murmured in a crying voice.

There was no one to reply to her.

When «Heartseed» appeared, gave them some information and left, she knew she couldn't take it any longer.

She really wanted to ask someone for help in tears, asking him what to do and how to do it.

However, she couldn't do it.

She had to be the strong Inaba Himeko she used to be.

That was what everyone expected. More importantly, that was what she wanted to be.

She wanted to become much more stronger.

Yet, maybe she couldn't do it this time.

"Is everyone ok..."

Having mumbled these words, Inaba couldn't help but to laugh, scoffing herself.

There was obviously no need to worry for others.

But why was she still pretending to be strong?

Holding her kneecaps, she curled up on the floor.

The strong feeling of the door gradually left her.

Her body was slightly warmed by her inner parts.

In the desolate clubroom, the air felt blatantly cooler.

"What...should I do?"

She looked at her chest and asked, waiting for an answer she might know.

She found no answer though. There was no exit, nor was there any sound.

There wasn't anyone here to reply herself.

'Let this be, then', Inaba thought momentarily, but quickly waved her head in denial.

"...I've got to do what I should."

If she don't hurry up, maybe Gotou would have already left school.

Heaving a sigh, Inaba pressed on her kneecaps and stood up grudgingly.

It should be fine. Being able to stand up meant everything was fine.

Yet, she didn't have the strength to sweep the dust on her skirt.



"Are you available at the moment? Taichi."

It was at his home at night.

Taichi received a phone call from Iori.

Her attitude was different from yesterday, seemingly calm and steady. She should be calling him at her own will.

"No problem. How rare of you to call at such a late time."

"Yes. Sorry...I really want to tell you when I can."

"It's fine. Go ahead."

Nagase's voice was obviously stiff, so she probably wasn't going to say something jovial. A little bit tensed Taichi was, as he knew anything could happen after they met «Heartseed».

"It's what follows our call the day before yesterday."

His heart beat tremendously; his ears heated up.

"Oh, you're saying that."

It was an unexpected call, and Taichi couldn't find what to say.

It was the afterword of their confirmation of their love towards each other.

"Perhaps you would think that who would be so mindful of these things when we're already messed up with another...Still, I believe that this thing we're dealing with is very important."

Rats. I should have taken better thought about it. There had been too much things that happened lately, occupying his mind that it was too late to even regret.

The afterword, the next stage.

He had to take the initiative this time, as these things should be commenced by males; but how should he start? Should he just directly speak it out? He did it last time but relying on his somewhat feint but strong will he tried to express in his words. If he continue to do the same thing, would this be

lacking in creativity? Or should he pay no heed to these sort of things? He should stop thinking of these things now, as his mind was getting messier and messier...While Taichi was still pondering on what to say, Iori had already commenced.

"...Can we reserve that?"

"Reserve...it?"

It was an unexpected development.

"Eh. It sounds a bit egotistical of me to say reserving it...but I want to keep this distance we have at the moment."

"Keeping this distance...you mean as a friend?"

Was it a conclusion Nagase made?

"Ah! Have you mistaken it? It's not what I meant! What I mean is to 'stay like what we are now.'"

Taichi couldn't really grasp what she was saying.

"What do you mean?"

"I want to say that...«Heartseed» is trapping us with this 'desire unleashing' thing. That, in some terms, mean that our 'hearts' are not in the normal state. I just think if we have any development in our relationships aren't that good at this state."

When Taichi took a deeper thought, she was right.

They still don't know what that desire unleashing thing «Heartseed» made would do to them. It surely was a bad idea to take any important actions at this situation.

"You're right...Sorry. I didn't think of this thing."

"There's no need to be sorry...Well, it's great that I could first let you know. So, please bear in mind that whatever happens in this strange situation has nothing to do with our relationship."

"Ahah. We still don't know what will happen after all. We're quite dangerous in this state."

Holding the phone in one hand and the other touching different body parts, Taichi couldn't find anything abnormal, though, unobservable changes were even more scary.

He had no idea what was going on in himself.

"However I look at it...it's very dangerous, for we don't know what we'll do...Umm, can I repent after that?"

Nagase spurted another word he couldn't catch the meaning of.

"That's certainly fine with me. But...to repent? To me?"

"I didn't do anything bad to you, but I just have a feeling of remorse...I want to confess everything to you to make myself feel better...Hmmm, I suck. Sorry."

"You don't suck, not at all. I'm always here with you to hear your complaints."

If they were lovers, Taichi had no way to advocate that.

"Thanks, Taichi...please let me act coquettishly."

"Sure," Taichi replied staunchly.

"I-I still don't have much confidence in myself."

It had been some time that Nagase would expose clearly her agonies.

Nagase had almost lost her authentic self due to over-speculating of others and playing too many roles.

Although she claimed what Taichi said had slightly ameliorated it, she seemed to still be strangled by the problem.

After all, it wasn't a thing that could be easily solved.

"Ummm..."

He knew in his heart, yet his voice still sunk.

"Ah, it isn't as serious as it was before! Or should I say, thanks to you, I feel a lot lighter now, I even feel recently that I can face others with my natural self. I'm honest."

"Then that's good to hear."

"Yeah. Thanks a bunch. Still, I would be a bit puzzled sometimes that whether it's fine to be like this, so I in fact have a little anticipation of the phenomenon that «Heartseed» has evoked," Nagase said with a rigid voice.

The cold, and non-smiling face of Nagase floated in Taichi's head again.

"To unleash the true desires of my heart. I'm just so convinced that the desires devoid of my prejudice is my authentic self. I know there's some kind of difference, but if this is a chance for me to understand my authentic self, I'm still looking forward to it."

The things one's true heart desires.

The authentic self.

Taichi didn't know a bit of what was right.

But he understood what Nagase meant and why she would have such a feeling.

"I hate myself for having such thoughts. The situation we're in now is extremely dangerous, with Yui and Aoki already being in tricky conditions, I really hate myself for having such selfish, egotistical thoughts...I hate it, but I can't stop myself from having them," Nagase murmured again at last, "okay! That's the end of my repent! Sorry for having you to hear me repent for so long! I'll treat you for something to eat next time!"

She switched her emotions swiftly as usual. He didn't know what she was really thinking, though, the bright and lively sound she pronounced swept away the dismal feelings she sent a while ago.

Taichi wanted to say something, but he didn't know what to say.

"So, thanks for talking with me so late at night. See you tomorrow!"

She was about to hang up. He had to say something.

"That's also the authentic Nagase!"

He couldn't make up his thoughts of what to say, he still managed to blabber something.

"Eh?"

"I was saying...the authentic Nagase is also able to observe things with patience and look at herself subjectively!"

Taichi tried to tell her what she thought.

"Eh...Ah...Is that so?"

"Yeah...maybe because I think my authentic self was seen by my usual everyday life."

"Hehe. Even if I get into something tricky, it looks like it doesn't matter anymore when you're around. I also want to endeavour to become someone who could bring comfort to others. So, bye bye!"

"Yeah. Goodbye."

Taichi turned off his phone, letting it lay at its original position.

There was something strange going on in his mind.

He wanted to find the root of it, though, it was too vague he failed.

"Forget it."

Taichi stood up in a spurt of energy.

He walked to beside the wall and opened the window. The breezing air blew in, replacing the air in the room with a fresh and cool one.

What would tomorrow be like? What would happen? What changes would there be?

They have decided to accept their situation. The battlefield would start tomorrow—no, it had already started.

"There must be a way...I'll come up with a way."

Having that said to himself, Taichi closed the window.

Chapter 3 - Have Our Usual Lives Changed?

I was even perplexed of whether to go to school this morning when I woke up.

The dangerous battlefield awaited me outside.

Nevertheless, putting it to an end earlier could lower the potential dangers than trying to procrastinate.

According to that guy, hiding myself at home would only lead to chaotic situations.

Firstly, I may be incapable of hiding myself in my room.

For in this phenomenon, I would head out if my heart thought so.

But it was irrefutable that this method was somewhat effective.

This may be the only effective way we have thought of.

However, what would happen if I employ it on myself?

Once I get into deep contemplation, I would fall into an abyssmal hole.

How deep would I fall? Would I get hurt because of it? What would I see at the end of the hole?

I didn't want to know.

Such being the case, maybe getting along with everyone joyously was the way to go.

Through satisfaction could I prevent myself from having expectations beyond the line—perhaps.

It was, however, how to maintain a distance from them was the difficult problem.

It was common sense that one would want to get closer when they were too far from each other; however, if they were too close to each other, one would take the risk to get even closer. These beings are what we call humans.

At last, all the roads I could choose were bumpy ones.

I couldn't find an answer no matter how I think.

If I were to have a clear, straight, and kind heart, I might be able to do it, and I won't have to fear arising problems.

This was the problem though: am I a kind person?



"Yo, Yaegashi. You're so late today."

Having gone to school after half of the afternoon recess had gone, Yaegashi Taichi was called by his classmate, Shingo Watase.

"Eh...Something happened," Taichi answered him ambiguously and undistinctly.

The 'desire-unleashing' thing still puzzled Taichi to this date.

"How odd it is to see students as serious as you can be late."

"All students should be punctual, you see."

"Oh. Model students sure speak differently."

Giggling, Watase said playfully.

"Ah. Right. You're so unfortunat today! You missed an important episode of your sweetheart. Yahh! That was epic!"

"Who are you referring to by my sweetheart?"

"That girl in that club of yours."

"You mean Nagase?"

"Oh...So Nagase is the one you're fond of."

"H-How did that happen?"

"Shouldn't Inaba and Nagase our only female classmates in your club? So, if you say Nagase's name when you hear the word 'sweetheart', it means..."

"Mmm...You set me up..."

Although he was bad at studying (or should I say he doesn't study), he was surprisingly smart.

"Geez, if it was not for your reluctance to say which one you're in favour of and which one you're just playing around."

"Didn't I always emphasize that I'm not in that relationship with them?"

"What? You're not deciding to take over either side of those beautiful girls around you? Be more like it when you try to pull a lie out!"

Taichi admitted they were together in terms of boys and girls. Nevertheless, he still reckoned he shouldn't be mistaken as a flippant man.

"Forget it. So Nagase is the one you favour. If you want to talk about it, I'm always here to help you. Don't be shy."

"I don't need your help! No...maybe I do," said Taichi, breaking off in the middle as if trying to hold back something.

Surprised for a moment, Watase then snort-laughed and gazed afar.

"Is it? You have grown into this stage already. How rueful it is to have been seeing you walk such a long road..."

"We've only met for just half a year."

"Haha. Don't mind that. I've got to go to the cafeteria. You should go meet your sweetheart, okay?"

"Stop saying that sweetheart thing...Ah, wait! Please don't spread any weird rumours around!"

With his back in front of him, Watase waved his hand and walked away slowly.

Taichi saw him off.

After Watase had turned around a corner, he was nowhere to be seen.

"Sigh...."

Taichi heaved a deep sigh, leaning on the wall as if he was looking out of the window.

"Ahah...I was so nervous..."

Taichi murmured in a voice so low no one could hear.

His heart beated and beated.

If his desires were to unleash now...

He wanted to suppress it, but this fear still invaded his mind, there was no way he could fight it out.

"Can I even go through a day?"

He received a message from Inaba, which was also sent to other members:

"Let's stay as we usually do. Of course the precondition is that we can meticulously control our desires. Everything will be fine. Believe in yourself."

Taichi was deeply convinced of what Inaba pointed out yesterday.

He had to believe in himself.

If he could remind himself to refrain from thinking of strange things and keeping the attitude he usually had, everything will be fine. Believe in myself! He told himself.

"Taichi. Why are you late? What happened?"

As soon as he met Inaba, he was pounced with a question.

"If you were to say something happened, there sure is...but if you were to say nothing happened, maybe you're also right...No, maybe my desires were unleashed...Wuaghh!"

Inaba squeezed Taichi's lips with her right hand.

"That hurts! Please don't scratch others with your fingernails!"

Taichi swept off Inaba's fingers. His lips felt a bit numb.

"If you don't want to be scratched, then please keep your voice down when you mention such things in the classroom. Please don't let others hear it, idiot."

"...S-Sorry."

Inaba was perfectly right. Taichi immediately apologised for his mistake.

There were around half of the students staying the classroom during afternoon recess. Because the classroom was so noisy, probably there was need to worry for eavesdropping if you talk quietly.

"...If you can, that is, I still hope you can remind me by less painful means."

"Why not you stop acting so stupid? I don't remember myself exerting any violence without reason."

Is that so? Sometimes it occurred to me that it wasn't the case...

"So. What happened to you? Oh, Taichi. Your cheeks seem a bit red."

"Mmm. Is it still red? I thought it had worn off..."

Taichi incessantly touched his own cheeks.

"It's still a bit red, but it isn't noticeable without close examination. So, back to the question—what happened?"

"Nyahh. I was also freaked out. I didn't know that kind of desire would be unleashed...It seems the desire unleashing thing lashed on me this morning."

"What desire was it?"

Inaba's eyes sharpened; she also looked extremely serious.

"I'm afraid it's... 'the desire to sleep'."

"Hiyahh!"

Inaba vibrantly poked Taichi's forehead.

"Ouch! Hey. That was some kind of violence without reason!"

"Who told you to say something so peaceful and dull with such a serious face! Don't make others feel nervous for nothing, you idiot!"

"T-That's not as easy as it sounds. I've been tormented by it the whole day."

This morning, Taichi didn't get up at his normal wake-up hours, and even how loud his alarm rang. When he was almost late for school, his mother called her sister to wake him up.

However, no matter how her sister shook him or slapped him, Taichi didn't show any sign of opening his eyes.

His sister originally called him up like usual, but when Taichi seemed insusceptible to all her calls, her sister couldn't help feeling afraid. Later she even used all her might to slap Taichi on the face, but Taichi still didn't wake up, making her cry out loud reluctantly.

Hearing her daughter's cry, Taichi's mother also came to Taichi's room to see what was going on. Yet, after she had checked Taichi's pulse and breathing patterns, she said, 'hmm. It's okay. Maybe he just needs some sleep', and hurried her daughter to school, going out herself too for work.

This was what Taichi learnt from the memo on the dining table and his sister's message. (Most of the information, around ninety-percent, came from her sister.)

"Like mother, like son. Indeed."

"What do we look alike?"

"It's that level of slow-wittedness and that aberrantly thick nerve which won't waver in most situations!"

Bother. That son's appearance was obviously wrong, yet that mother could get over it with just a 'maybe it's okay'. How bothersome it was for I to get compared to that kind of mother.

"However, from what you have said, your desires should have been unleashed. Is there anything different in your body?"

"No. Nothing is different. If I have to say, my mind is very clear now."

"That's because you've had such a good sleep, you idiot."

Not bad was it to be told an idiot by Inaba—probably something was going on its wrong way.

"Have you ever heard a voice in your head?" Inaba continued, asking.

"At least I haven't from what I can recall from my memory. But maybe because I've forgotten it while I was asleep."

"Oh. It doesn't mater then, maybe the desire unleashing thing lashed on you while you were asleep and forced you to sleep more...You didn't wake up once and sleep back, did you?"

"Ahah. No."

"Really? If that's the case, we can prove that what that bastard said about desires in our subconscious can be unleashed is true—even when you're sleeping."

Inaba crossed her hands at her chest, showing a face of contemplating.

"By the way, this episode is the longest in all the cases we have had...Yes, maybe the time length of the desire unleashing thing is very long, or maybe after your sister had did everything she could to wake you up, you still were sleeping even when the desire unleashing thing had ended. Forget it. It doesn't matter whatever it was since it have ended. You're lucky that it happened when you're sleeping at home."

"Let's take it like that then...Oh, there is something that I'm very aware of just then."

"Nagase has been lying on the table, not moving an inch...Was it because that the desire unleashing thing happened and she coincidentally wanted strongly to sleep?"

Taichi and Inaba had been talking beside her, but Nagase Iori didn't have any sign of joining their conversation, and she wasn't moving a bit.

"You don't need to be worrying about this, but...the trauma she has is a bit bothering. After all, I've reminded her not to be too dejected."

"What...happened?"

Taichi thought of Watase's telling him this was some important incident.

"Taichi's asking you."

Inaba put her hand on Nagase's shoulder.

"Wuagh..."

Nagase cried, slowly lifting up her head. She had a wan and pallid face, with her eyes all red, blood vessels stretching her eyeballs. Her hair bundled at her back also drooped as if it was also dejected.

"What? What happened?"

Taichi asked frantically. He was convinced something acute had happened.

"Hey, Taichi..."

"What?"

"Taichi...Have you ever tried in a serious time, or a serene space everyone is in...like in a cinema or when having a test at school...suddenly you have an impulse in your heart that you want to destroy this quietness?"

"Uh? I rarely have this kind of impulse...but I can understand. Or should I say, you are those who would have this impulse..."

Can it be...

Taichi's face tensed.

"Today when everyone had settled down in a quiz...I suddenly wanted to shout...so I couldn't help but to shout out loud 'Yaaahooo'..."

What a tragedy.

"And you also used an abnormally standard English tone, accentuating it with my raising left hand and a jump."

"I-Inaban...don't pour salt on my wound..."

Taichi was almost sure it was an extremely surprising scene.

"You got away by telling the teacher you have been sleeping too much, so there wasn't any actual loss."

Inaba added.

"So, how did everyone react?"

Taichi asked Inaba, with a bit hesitance and fear.

"Of course everyone was freaked out. Then they burst into laughter. Nevertheless, everyone thought it was a normal thing that Iori would do, so everything returned to normal afterwards."

"This is the most stunning! When I cried 'Yaaahooo' in class, everyone thought it was normal for me to do...How does everyone look at me...Wuaghh..."

Nagase swiped her tears away with a handkerchief.

"Oh, so Nagase has that thought in her heart to shout 'Yaaahooo' loudly in class..."

"Taichi...Please don't use such a calm tone as if you can understand everything...if it wasn't for the desire unleashing thing that forced me to act, I definitely wouldn't do that..."

"By the way, your desires are truly...peaceful."

Inaba murmured, marking the end of their conversation.

This was more of a stable and calm scene that appeared during the afternoon recess in class 1C.



It was after school when Taichi had grudgingly got through the lessons that day.

Taichi's nervousness had slightly been relieved.

Though he still had to be aware of his actions, but with his helping fellows from the club, he as well as the other club members had regained peace.

Today there were only four club members in the club instead of five.

Kiriyama Yui was absent again.

The club members discussed whether they should go check out how she was doing. After a while of discussion, they decided to directly phone her, but she only said that she would go to school after all that turmoil she induced had cooled down, and that it was fine if they didn't went to see her. For her response seemed unwilling for others to see her, they decided to cancel their visit.

"After «Heartseed» appeared, the fact that Yui haven't yet seen that guy directly is bugging me...Fine. Let it be. We've phoned her enough times and sent her enough messages. It's best to let her calm down alone..." Inaba lowered her eyes, murmuring to herself.

"Rats. Is Yui all right? It was all because of «Heartseed»...She cried very hard during the fight at the station. If Yui cries again, I'll never forgive him!"

"Aoki, let me ask you. State five good points about Yui!" Inaba suddenly shouted.

"Adorable! Bright! Strong! Super adorable! Pretty hair! Petite! Chaste! Like a child in the good side...Apparently five is not enough!"

"Stop saying 'adorable' two times. Oh, you even said eight!"

Taichi retorted in a low voice.

"So, Aoki, have your anger dissipated yet?"

"Nyahh? Was I angry? Ah...I seemed to be a bit unsatisfied with «Heartseed». What happened?"

"Didn't I say yesterday that we should not have too intense feelings? If our thoughts aren't much a big deal, so will our desires."

"You're right. But I almost..." dejected, Aoki drooped his head, showing a sign of introspection.

"Yes. If the desire unleash thing happens, and you want to shout in your heart 'Yaaahoo', that will be all that is needed to make it happen."

"Aye, Taichi. Is that a new way of bullying? Is that bullying?" Nagase asked, pulling Taichi's shirt.

At this moment, Aoki suddenly lifted his drooped head.

"By the way, didn't Inaba say it's better to act normal? Mmm...what should we do?"

"Actually lowering our desires is the best way, but it's difficult for us to control perfectly our emotions. So as to speak from the premise to prevent big troubles, we shouldn't suppress it too much, act normally, and think of other

things to calm ourselves down when we get strong emotions like anger," Inaba explained.

"Yeah. So I can think of Yui's things when I feel not pleased or angry to calm myself down."

"That's about it for you," Inaba nodded her assent unwillingly.

"Ok. Let me try. One Yui, two Yui, three Yui..."

"Are you counting sheep?" Taichi retorted.

"Four Yui...uh? I want to see Yui very much now! Oops...I have an impulse of rushing to her side! Is this an unleashing of desire?"

"It's so dumb I don't want to retort, but to prevent things from getting worse, I'll have to tell you first. You need to know how that unleashing of desire happens! So basically there isn't any unleashing of desires at the moment!" Inaba knocked potentially on Aoki's head.

"Inaban. Calm down. Calm down. You're the one who proposed we should always be calm."

Having pointing this out, Nagase continued to murmur, "However, I'm still worried about Yui who fought down those guys at the station...Yui must have felt a large impulse on so many levels..."

Kiriyama had androphobia, but her fighting skills sometimes even overpower boys.

Taichi remembered Kiriyama on the verge of tears when she showed him her agonies.

Taichi wanted to protect her. He knew he had to protect this girl with a petite body who was suffering in pain.

[Save her!]

A voice rang in his head.

Suddenly his conscious left his body.

Nevertheless, his conscious was still clear. His body also heated up at the same time.

Taichi stood up as if kicking his chair away.

Everybody was shocked at this site.

Taichi wanted to tell everyone this is because of the unleashing of his desires, yet he couldn't open his mouth by his conscious.

An impulse of wanting to rush out immediately overfilled his mind.

Yet, he didn't want to do this.

Two things in his body were fighting with each other.

"I'll go out for a bit."

Taichi said something plainly and headed out to the door.

"Is it...an unleash of his desires?"

He heard Inaba's voice from behind his back.

Everything seemed to escape from his sight.

Only one thing was in his mind, and he had to do it.

He really wanted to stop, but he couldn't.

Taichi decided to dash away.

"W-Wait, Taichi!"

"Wait, Taichi!"

Nagase and Aoki held onto Taichi's right hand and left hand respectively.

Taichi twisted his body, trying to shake their hands off.

"Get a hang of yourself, Taichi! Count Yui in your head like what we just said!
Ah...is that ineffective for Taichi?"

He could hear Aoki's voice.

"Taichi! What is wrong with you? What do you want to do?"

He could also hear Nagase's voice.

Taichi spew out the words of the impulse that filled his body.

"...I must go and save her...I must save the Kiriya who is in deep sorrow at the moment..."

Bang!

Inaba, coming out of nowhere, punched Taichi right at the face.

"How vigorous can you act when you want to help people? It's disgusting."

Taichi agreed with her. After all, everyone decided just then not to visit Kiriya today.



Nevertheless, Taichi couldn't stand the pain when he had thought that fact that Kiriama maybe in sorrow at the moment. He wanted to help her immediately.

Taichi shook off their hands, yet he was caught right again right at the spot.

"Calm down!"

Nagase pulled Taichi's hand.

"The desire to help Yui...maybe it doesn't really matter if we let him go...but surely it's better to stop him. Okay. Iori, embrace Taichi!"

"Understand! Inaban...but why me? If you want force, Aoki should be the guy," Nagase refuted.

"No. I thought of an idea. If we create a desire that can transcend all other desires Taichi has, maybe the desires that would be unleashed would change, or maybe the desire unleashing thing would end...Don't you think so?" Inaba elucidated. Taichi tried to evade Inaba and advance forward, but Inaba quickly stopped him.

Taichi wriggled in the three's suppression.

"Though the chance of success is low, it's worth a try, so go ahead! Embrace him from below! Do your best to evoke Taichi's perverted thoughts. Quick!"

"Say it slower...Eh, though I don't hate to do it!"

"Iori, go ahead, do it for Taichi!" Aoki also said, echoing Inaba's words.

"Do you guys really want to save me? You seem like playing," Taichi cried, shaking off everyone's hands.

"Do you have any problems?" Inaba said nonchalantly.

I didn't expect she would say in such an unregretful tone. What should I do?

"This doesn't look any dangerous. That's the idiot who loves to sacrifice, who loves to put others in front of himself, for you."

After Inaba had said that nonchalantly, Nagase pointed at Taichi and said, "By the way, Taichi. Have your spur of the moment ended?"



"Looks like the duration of the episode varies from around ten or so seconds to a few minutes," Inaba said in the clubroom, which has returned its serenity.

"What about that unleash of the desire to sleep I had this morning?"

"...Um, I hope that's an exception," Inaba furrowed her eyebrows as if she was shot right at the painful point.

"The time is quite short...could we say that? If that's the case, even if we have things we want to do, if we don't act it out immediately, probably the episode will end before we even carry it out," Nagase analysed.

"Perhaps there are a lot of these situations."

Having confirmed Inaba's assent of her opinion, Nagase continued, "So, probably nothing will happen if we always have wishes that can't be granted immediately."

"But, aren't those things we want strongly to do at an instant things around us? I think we would have in our conscious without much of our paying attention."

After Aoki had said that, Nagase covered her face with her hands.

"Ao-Aoki refuted me with such a serious tone!"

"Is there a need to feel surprised? Iori! I also have my times of acting serious!"

"Compared to our evoking of turmoils and events, that guy surely earns pleasure by observing our doubts and pain. Is the wavering in our hearts and our relationships the true thing that matters to him? Then this will explain that he doesn't want to make the episode troublesome but to use it as an induction of our wavering. If we take it like this..."

When Aoki and Nagase were debating with each other vigorously, Inaba began to make presumptions and inferences at a side. Taichi could tell she wasn't completely bluffing in front of «Heartseed» when she told him they will fight to the end. She was indeed Inaba.

Inaba stood upright, biting her nails, falling into contemplation.

Taichi looked at her, and thus their eyes met.

"Why are you making sheep eyes at me?"

"I make sheep eyes at you...No, maybe my eyes originally look like those of a sheep?"

If that was the case, then how terrible would that be. It felt I would be too afraid to stare at girls anymore.

Then, this time Inaba made sheep eyes at Taichi.

"W-What?"

"Heh. I think Taichi is undoubtedly the most dangerous in this phenomenon."

"What do you mean?"

"Because you will die for someone even when you have conscious, won't you?"

If someone had to die, Taichi proposed it was him.

"If the desires deep in your heart really get unleashed, who knows what will happen. To tell the truth, I even think it will be frightening."

Tachi couldn't refute her.

"You won't really die this time, will you?"

I shouldn't be that kind of a person...No, at least that was what I hoped so.

That's because I had learnt my lesson.

If I don't consider the people around me and act according to my own feelings, the people I'll hurt or the trouble I would give them are inestimable.

I reminded myself to take meticulous care.

However, what do I really expect in the depths of my heart?

I had no idea too.

No, maybe I could know through this phenomenon—the unleashing of desires?

Chapter 4 - The Collapse and Detachment of Their Bonds

Was it simply my luck?

Or was it simply because I was a nice person?

The gratifying thing to think was that nothing serious occurred over the weekends.

Hmph. I guessed it was most likely due to my plan.

But if you were to ask me what I really had done, I would tell you that the most crazy thing I did was snatching my brother's food at dinner, buying expensive computer peripherals on the net, dancing around in my underwear, and going into my brother's room in search of erotic printlets out of curiosity to male sex—but then I gave up as I didn't find any.

Okay, so nothing really big had happened at all—I hoped so.

And from what I heard from the others, the unleashing of desires on them only induced similar events.

For example, there was someone who took a peek at his little sister's phone out of uneasiness of whether his sister had a boyfriend. Then, his sister neglected him for the entire day, and he had to buy a spate of snacks from the convenience store to serve his sister.

Another example would be someone who wanted to climb a tree at the spur of the moment on her way back home. But when she got up, she felt extremely embarrassed once she acknowledged the fact that her panties were seen during her climb.

Another example was someone who reckoned the idea of studying should be trashed and actually threw his books and notes into the paper recycling bin but got back to bring them back in a scurry afterwards.

Of course, all of these were trivial matters that would only lead them to receiving a warning at the most.

On Monday morning, I prepared to go to school as usual.

I wanted to lead everyone to follow a usual life.

I had to be careful to maintain everything safe and usual.

They were nice people.

I wouldn't have to be afraid of this if I were a nice person.

So, everything would be fine if everything would stay at its place.

Besides, I should also be—of course, I was not as worse as being totally incredulous of humans, yet I don't allow myself to put my trust on people.

I understood the world I was living in was filled with enemies.

Why? This was because humanity was dark to me.

Why? This was because I belonged to the dark.

However, didn't I reckon them as nice people?

Who knows? I wouldn't know what was right.

Or even, I wouldn't even know what person I was.

At recess time after the end of the second lesson, Nagase Iori returned to her classroom to tell something to Yaegashi Taichi, "I paid a visit to Class 1A. They said Yui didn't come to school today."

"Oh..."

Excluding the weekends, Kiriya Yui had been absent for four continuous days. Taichi couldn't help worrying whether something happened to her.

"When I called her, she said she was all right through the phone."

As Nagase murmured, Inaba Himeko walked towards them.

"I hope she didn't collapse."

"What do you mean by...collapse?" Taichi asked Inaba.

"I mean something going nuts like what happened last time."

Collapsing and going nuts weren't too extravagant words to describe their situation.

"We must pay a visit to her house even if she denies our request. I know her address anyway," said Nagase, terribly perturbed.

"All right. Let's do it."

Taichi nodded his assent nervously.

"Don't put on those tensed faces when we don't even know how things will work out. Let's put a smile on our faces! Should we visit Yui with such immensely serious faces, she would surely shut herself away, and our plan will

backfire. Let's visit her joyfully, shall we?" Inaba said with a smile upon seeing Taichi's and Nagase's faces.

A mysterious thought occurred to Taichi for a moment that the smile on Inaba was the most fragile.



Kiriyama's house was a two-storey townhouse situated in the residential area.

"Hey..."

The speaker replied to them the second time Taichi pressed on the doorbell. The sound was husky and devoid of vigour, but it was surely Kiriyama's voice. Hearing her voice assured Taichi a bit.

"Kiriyama-san. Come out and play!" Nagase played around like a primary student. Notwithstanding some of her voice was only her feint, she really presented an extremely joyous facade.

"Eh? Hold on. Is it Iori? It can't be. Why?"

Kiriyama seemed astonished by Nagase's unplanned visit.

"Oh, I'm here too! Together with Inaba and Taichi."

Sticking his head out, Aoki Yoshifumi waved to the speakers.

"There aren't any cameras alongside the bell," Taichi retorted anyway, unknowing of whether Aoki had such cognition.

"Oh, hi. So, everyone's here?"

"We're here to visit you. May you let us in? Are we causing any trouble to your family?" Nagase pushed Aoki aside and spoke to the speakers.

"There aren't anyone here...but I can't! Please don't come. Please leave."

Her trembling voice didn't fight off her resolved stance of rejecting their arrival.

"Is it because there are boys here? Would you let Inaba and I in?"

"It has nothing to do with that. Anyway, I can't let you in."

"But why?"

"That uniform...oh, are you Yui's friends? Is there anything I can help you?"

Someone, most likely Kiriya's mother, had just arrived. Kiriya had seemed to lock herself in her room recently. This was the worst way one could take in this situation.

"All right, Yui! Open the door now! Your friends are here to visit you!"

Kiriya's mother shouted as she knocked the door.

"Bother! Take them away!" a fierce howl came back through the door in the opposite direction.

"I'm really sorry. She have locked herself in her room lately and have been reluctant to come out..." Kiriya's mother said apologetically towards them with her head lowered. She looked even more petite now.

"None of this sort happened before. This was due to the effects of the police counseling indeed."

"It's fine, miss. I think she's only a bit wavered. She would unwind soon."

Inaba showed her a business smile—it seemed she was capable of such things if she had put her heart in it.

"So, leave it to us, Miss!"

"Aoki, you don't have to exaggerate 'Miss'...oh forget it."^[5]

Taichi kicked away his idea of retorting, as he had found this mere act even more troublesome.

"Thanks so much for caring our daughter..." Kiriyaama's mother deeply bowed her head to thank them.

"You're welcome," they modestly replied.

"So, will I be a hassle if I stay here? I'll wait downstairs. Please tell me if you have any problems."

With that said, Kiriyaama's mother went downstairs, her back painted with loneliness. Looking at her with observation, one would find her face was also a bit wan. Although the ones involved in the unleashing of desires were only the five of them, the effects had already spread to their surroundings, forming on a burden on them.

"Yui, it's not good to let your mother feel sad for you," Nagase said in a voice with anger, oddly. Perhaps Nagase's mother had divorced for several times, and that she was now in a single-parent family, she had a deep remark on the mum-daughter relationship.

"Anyway, Yui, let's have a talk. Things have got even more tricky now," Aoki tried to persuade her in a different way, though Kiriyaama was still adamant to yield.

"Please leave. I'm thankful for all your kindness. But please give some time. I'll return to school after that."

"Hmphh. What a hassle."

Inaba turned her necks, stretching her body out.

"What are you trying to do?" asked Taichi, backing from her at the same time.

"Nothing really. I only want to speak out the magic words that would force her to open the door immediately."

"Who the hell are you?"

"Cough. Anyway, let us start now until she let us in. Allow me to expose Kiriyaama Yui-san's secrets one by one. First, her BWH from head to toe is..."

Click.

"Hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on! I'll let you in. Hold on!"

"Gosh. If only you could start telling us those figures, everything would become more interesting."

Taichi reckoned that Kiriyaama's immediate yielding was correct.

Clumping into a ball, Kiriyaama sat on her bed with her hands holding on her kneecaps. She was wearing sportswear: a sports shirt, a sport pants—it was a complete household outfit. Her usual combed and tidied chestnut hair now looked a bit unkempt and messy; her face also told her weariness.

After Taichi and the others had sat on the floor, the room seemed a bit crowded.

"Sorry for coming to your house without previous notice; we're really worried of you, Yui."

"It's no big deal, Iori. Anyone would feel awkward for someone who locked himself or herself in their houses without any specific reasons to do so."^[6]

Kiriyama clenched on her flower-patterned pillow tightly and shook her head.

"Do you feel sick? Is there anything uncomfortable? We will return if that is the case. Oh, by the way, there's one big acne on your forehead. Does this have to do with..."

"No, no, no! Don't look! Yipes!"

After Aoki pointed it out, Kiriyama shoved her bangs in a scurry and covered her forehead.

"This was...the worst mistake I've made in my life."

"Have you eaten and drank in a frenzy?"

Upon hearing Inaba's guess, Kiriyama screamed and fell over on her bed. It seemed she was right.

"No...It's a sudden impulse that came over me yesterday that urged me to eat a lot of sweet things, though I often think of this, I couldn't refrain from doing so this time. And after checking the calories of the food I'd eaten afterwards, I knew death was awaiting me."

Perhaps her desire of eating sweet stuff was unleashed when she was hungry.

"The reason why you would be absent for school couldn't possibly be due to that acne, could it?"

"Of course I wouldn't for such a reason!" Kiriya stood up to rebuke Inaba's words.

"So, the reason lies on the unleashing of desires «Heartseed» have caused?" asked Inaba distinctly.

Kiriya's body twitched, her face becoming pale. She was an easy thing to understand. But because of this, it made it somewhat uneasy to communicate with her. Yet, pure silence wasn't the way.

"Yui. It must have been tiring and difficult to undergo the unleashing of desires," Aoki comforted Kiriya.

"Are there any problems that would be aroused by the unleashing of desires?" asked Taichi to himself.

Kiriya's eyes became damp, her eyebrows tilting downwards in sorrow.

"Taichi, could you ask with more euphemism?"

Iori glared at Taichi.

"Right. Sorry."

"I think it's fine. At least it's better than dragging along the whole day."

"Inaba and Yui can't be treated with the same metric."

Inaba only replied to angry Nagase with an agreeing tone and recommenced, "So, Yui, what is the relationship between the unleashing of desires and you locking yourself in your room? You've told us a lot already, so adding this

wouldn't hurt, would it? It isn't irrational for one to lock oneself in a room if one were to act against their will."

Kiriyama looked downwards and nodded.

"Ahah? Stop joking around. Everyone have this situation."

"But this is because I don't want to hurt anyone anymore."

Large droplets of tears slid from Kiriyama's eyes. The thing that Kiriyama scared the most was to hurt someone else. Her feelings were sent painfully and deeply.

"O-On that day, I saw the girl being bugged by some boys. I thought that these boys were shit, and I had to help the girl. Then, I began trolling around after hearing that sound..."

"But this is because of the weird stuff «Heartseed» had caused."

As Nagase was trying to convince her, Kiriyama interrupted and yelled, "But I really wanted to teach those guys a lesson!"

The feelings produced in one's heart were in fact the purest feelings one could possess. It was enough to cause one to sense guilt and fear.

"Besides, I'm have a strong sense of repelling boys. Should this happen again next time, I don't know what I'll do. I'm so scared. How can I have the guts to go outside?"

Taichi thought it was a feeling that could be understood, but at the next instant...

"Stop having this boring pose of a victim," Inaba cried, her face filled with hate and disgust.

"Stop locking yourself in the room and try to escape."

Inaba glared at her with eyes so sharp it looked as if it might shoot right through Kiriya. Inaba had completely gone into troll mode. Does she usually troll like this? Or was it because of the effects of desire unleashing?

"B-But wouldn't everyone be safe from damage if I don't meet anyone?"

"Do you understand the situation we're in? Ah? Don't you know?"

Inaba approached the backing Kiriya gradually,

"Wait, Inaba!"

"In-Inaba!"

"Calm down, Inaba!"

Nagase, Aoki, and Taichi tried to cease Inaba, but Inaba just wouldn't stop.

"We're under control of that idiot «Heartseed». And that guy wants to make things more interesting, and thus making those personality exchanges and desire unleashes. Do you understand up to this point?"

Under Inaba's oppressive tone, no one dared to make a sound. Inaba didn't move but kept saying. Taichi didn't know how to react to her.

"It is a good response to evade the problems of the desire unleash by locking oneself in one's house, but because this is the best strategy, it's the worst way."

Did locking oneself in one's house counted as going against the rules? Inaba's question for «Heartseed» once again ran in his mind.

"There wouldn't be any problems if you were in a space where there is no one and absolutely nothing. This could be our largest defense as well as our offence."

Inaba stood up, stepping on Kiriyaama's bed with one of her feet, and continued to speak, "But let me ask you, would it be interesting for that guy?"

They didn't understand the interests and the way of logic of «Heartseed», but they could perceive it wasn't interesting for him if they did that.

"Let me ask you again: is this interesting for that guy? Also, if it isn't, what would he do then? He might have a plan B waiting for us. First, he might give up if he's not interesting. Second, he might make it until it becomes interesting. Third, he might make it more interesting if it's not interesting enough."

How much had Inaba analysed it? Taichi was a bit appalled.

"I tried to ask that guy whether locking oneself in one's house counted as going against the rules, and that guy told me that it might be interesting, but he will make things more interesting when it's necessary."

Forgetting even to cry, Kiriyaama just froze there, losing the vigour in her body.

"In other words, that guy wouldn't adopt the first action but the second or third. But he may be lying, as he does not have credit of any kind. However, he may act what he said. The most important thing is that that guy has the ability to do so."

Inaba's personal performance was finally going to its finale.

"Are you planning to lock yourself in your room, trying to escape from this desire unleash? Or do you want something more appalling than the desire of unleash to happen? Do you realise how much trouble you will bring to others just by letting yourself have an easy life? Tell me now!"

"I don't understand...of what I should do..."

Kiriyama cried, her face completely pulverized.

"Don't pretend to be cute. Don't think that someone will help you if you cry!"

This line gave the total fatal hit to Kiriyama.

"Inaban! You're over the line!"

Nagase tried to stop Inaba, but everything was too late. Kiriyama shoved herself in her sheets, sobbing. She couldn't even lift up her body. Still, she gave her all into suppressing her sound, so she didn't cry out loud. It was depressing to merely look at this scene. Having finished speaking, Inaba kept silent. Nagase crawled onto the bed, caressing Kiriyama like taking care of a fragile object. Before Nagase crawled onto the bed, Inaba had already transferred her feet off of the bed. Taichi peeked at Inaba's face. It was pan, without any sense of the violence just then. She was biting her lips so hard it looked as if her lips might bleed. Taichi lost the chance to call her since her face was too dejected with sorrow. Then, as if detached, Inaba sat beside the bed crudely.

The reason why she would take her words into that stage was certainly due to the effects of the desire unleash. If she were in her normal status quo, even if

she was stern, she wouldn't adopt such a speaking method of hurting Kiriyaama.

"Sorry, Yui. I didn't plan to take my words to that stage. No, originally, I shouldn't be that angry. It was because of the desire unleash. And Yui...I know that it is very painful to hurt somebody against your own will, yet I said those words without much care...It's my fault. Please forgive me."

Inaba endeavoured to weave her words, stretching her hand out to Kiriyaama at the same time.

"But, Inaba, this is what you think, is it not?" said Kiriyaama intermittently while crying.

The hand Inaba stretched lost its target and wavered, going downwards before reaching Kiriyaama. Taichi felt scared of what awaited them. The unleashing of desire could hurt people to such a stage and destroy inter-personal relationships to such an extent. On that day, they still couldn't bring Kiriyaama out of her room.



On the following day, Kiriyaama still didn't go to school.

She had become famous in school for fighting in that mad event, and had inevitably become the talk of the town among the students.

Because she was in the same club as Taichi, Taichi was asked of her recent statuses a few times at school this morning.

This made Taichi even more perturbed and distracted in the lessons.

Originally, he wanted to plan on how to solve Kiriyama's problem, but then he hesitated. What would happen if the unleashing of desires were to occur now?

He had also experienced his desire of helping Kiriyama being unleashed, resulting in him running out suddenly.

Ever since the weird sound Nagase made in the lesson, no one in the club dared to do anything at the spur of the moment in the lessons.

After all, the times they would have the episode would range from one to three times one day, along with the fact that Inaba's preventive suggestion worked out fairly well.

To put it simply, all they did in the lessons was to concentrate in their lessons or sleep.

Nagase and Inaba dexterously utilised these two ways to go through every lesson.

Even Aoki who was unable to concentrate on his studies tried to spend his previous night awake, draining all of his energy, and sleep in the lessons the following day.

Concentrating in the lessons wasn't a tough job for Taichi, so every time when he heard the voice that reminded him his desire was about to unleash, he would repeatedly raise questions for the teacher.

So, it wasn't the time to think about Kiriyama but to concentrate on his lessons, and thus...

Time past gradually. In the recess time between two lessons, since they have transfer to another classroom for the next lesson, there were only a few people staying in class 1C.

"Let's go, Yaegashi. We wouldn't make it if we don't go now," said Watase Shingo, leaving alongside with Taichi.

At this moment, a loud growl shot in the classroom.

"How would I know? Stop asking me!" shouted Nagase.

"Ah? I was only asking how is Kiriya doing."

In the silent classroom, the girl Kiriya shouted at pouted in discontent.

"This was what I want to know!"

Having shouted angrily, Nagase was even more surprised than the girl she was shouting at.

"Why should I let you scream at me?"

"Um. No. This wasn't what I meant."

Nagase was at a loss, unknowing of what to do when asked by the angry girl. From what Nagase did, Taichi suspected her desires should have unleashed. Taichi wanted to help at first, but he then hesitated. If he were to cease the girl questioning Nagase, and then his desire was unleashed, what should he do then? He had even tried to hit Fujishima Maiko when she pulled a prank about Nagase. Nevertheless, his chance of having his desires unleashed now was low, although that guy could let these things work at his will or spontaneously. If that guy was watching at them right now, would he let go off this chance?

"Do you really think you could be so full of yourself because you look so adorable?"

"No. It's not..."

The girl questioning Nagase was so infuriated.

"Hey. Don't you think you should save your precious darling?" asked Watase seriously, though his line seemed to be a joke.

"Ah, but..."

Inaba Himeko was near them. Taichi believed Inaba would have a plan to solve this, but Inaba did nothing and left the classroom with just a glance at the puzzled Nagase. Only at this moment did Taichi feel an even larger shock than Nagase shouting angrily at her classmate: Inaba neglected Nagase's crisis. He thought this was all a mistake. He thought this was just a result of the unleashing of desires.

"Hey," Watase called Taichi again, making Taichi come back to his senses.

Taichi knew he had to go up front and help Nagase. But before this, someone else interrupted the two girls—it was Fujishima Maiko.

"Stop. This is it."

She pushed the two girls apart, creating some distance. Afterwards, she stood beside Nagase and said, "Sorry, Setonai-san. Kiriya-san's issue has become a rather sensitive issue to Nagase-san. She has been asked of the same thing several times since this morning, which irritated her, shouting at you as a result. Am I right, Nagase-san?" asked Fujishima as she held her glasses and looked at Nagase.

"Oh...okay. I was very frustrated too. When I thought of that incident, I carelessly...I'm sorry for ranting just because of an inquiry of someone's condition. It's my fault," said Nagase, laying her hands on her sides and lowering her head in apology.

"Um. You don't have to make an official apology. I'm also the one to blame: I shouldn't have got angry at you and spoke bad things like that. Perhaps I said something despicable."

"It's fine. It's my fault after all. Oh look, the next lesson is about to start. Let's go there together...And Fujishima-san, thank you for helping us out."

"Don't mention it."

It seemed that things wrapped up pretty well without Taichi's help.

"Fujishima-san is so awesome," said Watase beside Taichi, though Taichi was too distracted to listen to what he had said.



Time flew quickly, and all of the lessons had ended. There was some free time to spend during and in between the lessons, but Taichi just couldn't concentrate on thinking about matters pertaining to Kiriya, Nagase, and Inaba. This was because he knew he would become emotional however he tried to think things rationally. He was perturbed by the fact that the unleashing of desire would occur at any single moment. Nevertheless, he didn't have to worry about this once the lessons had ended. There were only

club members in the clubroom, so should dangerous situations occur, they could help each other. With this in mind, he knew he couldn't do anything by himself, not even thinking of what to do. This was frustrating, and more importantly, it made him look like a coward. But with everyone's strength, he should be able to do whatever should be done; however, Taichi's wish was shattered easily.

"I have to go back home today. I've told Iori about this. Bye," said Inaba to Taichi who was about to reach the clubroom, and she left the classroom afterwards.

"Oi...Hey!"

Kiriyama hadn't yet come to school today, and problems were left unresolved. They agreed to talk about this beforehand, but now Inaba's gone, it would become a headache. Taichi scurried away to catch up with Inaba. Inaba, with her back straight, walked pretty fast. When Taichi reached the corridor, she had already gone to the shoes cupboard. Running, Taichi could barely catch Inaba.

"Hey, Inaba! What do you mean by going back home? Do you have something you need to do?"

"Nothing," said Inaba, changing her shoes and slamming the door of the shoe cupboard afterwards.

"Nothing? Do you remember Kiriyama hasn't gone to school yet?"

"So?"

With that said, Inaba went outside school. Taichi followed her closely.

"What do you mean by 'so'? Shouldn't we pay a visit to Kiriyaama or something?"

"Even if I go there...it would only become a predicament."

What was she speaking? Taichi became irascible. Wasn't it irresponsible to let your friends get hurt and depressed? When his anger rushed into him, Taichi thought of something: perhaps the episode yesterday hurt Inaba greatly too. It was like how Kiriyaama got hurt mentally after hurting someone. It was the same for Inaba. Her words hurt Kiriyaama, which hurt herself as a result.

[Is that even a reason?]

A voice rang in his mind. Carelessly, He heard the sound. Familiar feelings rushed into him. His body heated up. Although his conscious was still here, he started to become isolated from his body. This was bad, Taichi thought. He wanted, at the least, tell her the unleashing of desire was happening—but it was impossible. His mouth began to move against his will, "Become a predicament? Why are you giving up so easily? Even if that happens, we still have to think up measures to counteract it."

Inaba stopped walking for the first time.

"Please don't think that anyone could think with the premise of placing everyone else as their top priority. Even I have times when I couldn't even manage to deal with my personal affairs!"

"Albeit, you still can't leave people who are hurt alone!"

"Stop enforcing your own thoughts and feelings on others!"

Taichi's own will to stop himself was futile. The impulse in him transcended everything else. Did this mean his thoughts were so strong? Was he this kind of a person? The unleashing of desire didn't stop here.

"I'm too disappointed of you, Inaba. I couldn't believe you can let your comrades die in vain," he knew his words had crossed the line, "I couldn't believe this is all you would do."

He wanted to puke for his despicable words. Shocked, Inaba kept still, though her face was totally wretched.

Taichi had never seen such shock in Inaba. She looked as if she might cry at any moment. Some time passed, the heat left him, and his sense had gone back to him. Still, his chest was tensed, making him unable to move. He couldn't imagine how he could have possibly hurt Inaba to such a stage.

"I'm really sorry, for this is all I could do," said Inaba with a sobbing voice.

She then ran away as if escaping, crossing through the courtyard and leaving through the gate. Taichi couldn't catch her. In the clubroom, with tensed atmosphere, and with Inaba absent, Taichi, Nagase, and Aoki began to discuss relevant measures, and paid a visit to Kiriya as usual. Yet, problems were still left unresolved.



On the following day, Taichi left his home early to directly apologise to Inaba as soon as he could. Taichi was in serious self-disgust yesterday. Inaba was

very precious to him. He took her as the most dependable, the most venerable person. She was the greatest person he knew. It was because of his extreme expectation that he would say something like he was disappointed at her. Yet, didn't this also meant he didn't need her help at the same time? Back then, he only thought about Kiriya's matters and how to save her—he belittled other people because he wanted to help one person. Surely, Kiriya was in pain, but Inaba would also feel bad—he couldn't even realise this. It was his stupidity that hurt Inaba. What a coward he was. Having entered the classroom, Taichi walked towards Inaba. Inaba had always been early to school.

"Even though I've sent a message to you yesterday, I still want to apologise to you directly. I couldn't believe I said all those selfish crap. It must have been because the only thing in my mind was Kiriya's dejected demeanor when she locked herself in her house. And it was also due to the unleashing of desires. As a result, I paid no heed to everything else except for that matter," said Taichi, though he knew in his heart this excuse was futile.

There was a smile on Inaba, though it was a smile of depression. When Taichi remembered Inaba sobbing yesterday, his chest grieved.

"Forget it. We can't do anything about that."

"Please don't say that. Inaba, you were feeling bad too, I shouldn't have put my emotions before everything else."

"I'm not really mindful of that. Besides, didn't you say you said that because you really want to help someone? Taichi, you don't need to be so vexed by that," said Inaba overly gently, "but I don't want to go to our club or Yui's home yet. Even I too want some time to adjust my feelings."

Even when Inaba was in deep pain, she still cared about Taichi's feelings. This fact enlarged Taichi's shock. Taichi knew Inaba was in great pain and wanted to help her deep down in his heart. But from what he had learnt yesterday, he helped others who were in pain because he didn't want to see them suffer. If he were to approach Inaba like this, he may hurt her again—he was afraid of this. Even at this moment, he could greatly feel Inaba's will of keeping their distance. If he could relieve her pain indirectly by keeping their distance, he would, perhaps, need to resort to this. Nevertheless, there was something he must first clarify.

"I still hope you can stay here, Inaba, because you are my important comrade. If you need help, you can tell us anytime. We'll be here for you."

This line and the feelings it embodied was definitely not a lie of any sort.

"I understand, so please leave me now. I have to concentrate my all on my studies," said Inaba with awkward gentleness, her tone holding the same magnitude of sorrow within her gentleness.



Today, in the clubroom, was still the same people yesterday—Taichi, Nagase, and Aoki. Kiriya hadn't gone to school still. Although the three of them visited her the previous day, they weren't fruitful.

"Inaba can't come today too?"

"Yeah. It seems her rant on Yui shocked herself too. Even though Inaba look so strong and resolute, she also has her weak side," said Nagase carefully. Her care in her words reflected her attentiveness to Inaba.

"Perhaps it's a better idea now to let her calm down alone," said Taichi, though he didn't like the idea of letting people alone, he would still justify it by thinking it was good for Inaba—if

"It just feels lonely here," murmured Nagase, looking at the fold chairs with no one sitting on them. There were now two vacant seats. And a desolate feeling rushed into Taichi. Should the club collapse like this...such a scary feeling swept through his mind.

"Anyway, Inaba should be back after a while. Let's take a look at how we can solve Kiriya's problem," Taichi commenced, driving their discussion.

Nevertheless, the discussion among the three of them couldn't get through the bottleneck they were stuck in.

"That's what it is then."

"Taichi, um...you've said that a while ago," corrected Nagase.

Feeling that their discussion was just going in circles, Taichi couldn't help heaving a deep sigh. Their discussion had ended up in a deadlock.

"What should we do now?" asked Aoki, lying on the sofa, gazing upon the ceiling.

"We don't know what's the best. After all, Inaba's and Yui's propositions had their own reasons," murmured Nagase as a response to Aoki's murmur to himself.

Inaba once implied that the most ideal way to treat this phenomenon was to lock oneself in one's house, but it was, at the same time, the worst way. Was it really a good idea to bring Kiriya outside? They couldn't come down to a conclusion. With this doubt, they couldn't adopt strong and resolute measures. Along with the fact that if their emotions go too strong, they would end up with deadly consequences. They had lost their way in what to think or how to think. Only impatience accumulated in them over time.

[Save her!]

Taichi could hear the sound faintly. He felt his body was heating up.

"I still don't reckon Kiriya locking herself in her house will do her any good," said Taichi, his mouth moving on its own.

"But won't Yui easily get hurt if she goes outside?"

"Besides, probably people around her would receive actual damage...though we suffer the same fate."

Aoki and Nagase replied respectively. To tell the truth, Taichi had already become tired of these excuses.

"But isn't Kiriya now in deep sorrow, even when she has shut herself away?"

His mouth moved on its own. Why couldn't he tell which thing was the most important? Kiriya had blatantly become weary. He couldn't let the problem stand there.

"Do you only care about how to deal with Yui's matters? You should also consider matters afterwards!" said Aoki, impatient as well.

"The most important thing now is to save Kiriyaama."

This was what Taichi thought was correct.

"Is this your expertise—the only thing at hand is to save those in need—again? Do you want to sacrifice yourself again to solve the problem?"

"What do you mean by that? Aoki, don't you want to save Kiriyaama too?"

Hold on a moment. Why was my mouth moving on its own? Still, with this cognition, I couldn't stop.

"I want to save her, but I don't know what to do?"

"If that's the case, let's first head to Kiriyaama's house."

"What can we do then?"

"Think of a way to save her."

"Didn't we have nothing to come up with yesterday and the day before?"

"Still, nothing would change if we just discuss here?"

If they don't adopt any measures or advance, nothing would change.

"Hey. Stop it, you two."

"Forget it. I'll be going on myself only today."

Taichi picked his schoolbag and stood up from the fold chair. It was just a waste of time to argue with them.

"Hey? Can't you just do everything on your own?"

"I want to do things on my own way today. If it's me, Kiriya can be saved."

"Taichi, who do you think you are? Do you think you're omnipotent?"

"Isn't this what we can tell from the facts? Aoki, aren't you nearly helpless?"

At this moment, Aoki widened his eyes, frozen at his spot. Afterwards, his emotions began changing. Taichi could tell, slowly, that Aoki's desire was unleashed.

"Hey, Stop it..."

"Do you really think everything will go along your will every single time? Are you planning to wrap everything up just by yourself?"

Aoki stood up, approaching Taichi gradually.

"What do you mean wrapping things up by myself? I'm going to save Kiriya!"

Taichi pushed away Aoki who was trying to approach him.

"What do you mean by saving her? All you want to do is to prevent yourself from seeing her drowned in sorrow. You're just one selfish jerk!"

"Shut up! Even if I'm what you say I am, I'm more stronger than something who does nothing with such a crisis before him!"

"What are you saying..."

"You two. Stop it already!" cried Nagase loudly. She intervened between Taichi and Aoki, trying to push them apart with her hands.

Her eyes had widened greatly. Would it be that Nagase had her desire unleashed too? Losing his balance, Taichi backed a few steps.

"Taichi, you're just opinionated! Aoki, you're just too jealous of him!" shouted Nagase who was between them, her hair vibrating vigorously behind her head.

"Are you two really trying to think for Kiriya? Taichi, Aoki, you two just don't want to see Yui hurt, is it not?"

[Stop messing around!]

Another voice rang in Taichi's mind. This time, it was a very clear, explicit voice. His body heated up even greater—to a temperature that he felt similar to the temperature of boiling water. He felt his body was gradually leaving him. This time, he was sure his desire was unleashing. But, what happened back there? Did he just suppose he had a desire unleash back then? Was the voice only his own hallucination? Had he succumbed to his own desire? He couldn't believe in himself anymore. Was it because of this that made him abandon himself in despair? The magnitude that his conscious was leaving his body was the greatest he had ever experienced until now. His conscious had floated afar. At the instant of the unleashing of desire, the strongest feeling and emotion was to help Kiriya. This desire had dominated Taichi's heart. Everything else had become a predicament. He wanted to shout and call for a stop, but he couldn't.

"Scram!" shouted Taichi as he pushed Nagase away.

He pushed her. He didn't use much strength. He only wanted to move Nagase away from blocking his path. He was a boy, and she was a girl. Besides, this was an unexpected attack. Nagase lost her balance, her head hitting on a cabinet.

"Wuagh..."

Nagase held her head, kneeling down. After that, the heat slipped away from Taichi all in one instant. His senses were gradually returned.

"A-Are you all right? Nagase..."

Tachi flew to Nagase's side. At this moment, Aoki said a pivotal line: "Look! It is because of your selfishness that would hurt people around you!"

His heart grieved, as if it was clutched together. Aoki was right: he would, because of his selfishness of not wanting people around him to get hurt, hurt people—even people he liked. He knew he hadn't the right to save anyone with this stance. In front of the bewildered and static Taichi, Aoki also stood still, as if frozen.

"...No, wait! My words crossed the line. I'm sorry," said Aoki in a husky voice, feeble and insignificant.

What happened later was lost in pieces in his memory like a dream. It was most likely that they left there and went back home themselves. Still, some things were left in his memory, including Nagase's forehead, turning red, him apologising to Nagase several times, and Nagase comforting him by saying, "You pushed me away because the unleashing of desire told you to push away me who was intervening. You don't need to apologise."

Taichi stayed in his room alone, wrapping himself under the quilt. He was afraid because he had hurt the person he liked the most. Then, he knew, at last, that Kiriya had a similar feeling he was having.



I failed.

I didn't plan to get near him.

I didn't want everything to fall apart because of myself. It was an overload to me.

Nevertheless, it was I who made those illusions.

I hoped I would become someone necessary to others.

I hoped to create a place that would accommodate myself.

Thus, it was my own fault for others being disappointed of myself when their delusions shatter.

Perhaps I couldn't go there anymore.

When my thoughts reached this step, my chest would hurt, and my heart would grieve.

My corrupted heart would always think of these useless and repugnant matters.

I was afraid again to approach them.

If I was too near, I was afraid I would get hurt, but if I was too far, I was afraid I would lose my balance.^[7]

Where should I stand? Where should I stay? Where was my accommodation?

This and that—I was just thinking of my own personal affairs.

Like others, I felt bad, but I hated myself for only caring for myself instead of others who needed more care than myself.

Besides, others had mistaken that I wasn't this kind of a person.

My hypocritical mask would soon fall off.

It was the most unbearable to be torn off, not by others, but by that person.

And the most important thing was that I had lost my confidence in sustaining my most ideal self.

I was just a stupid and insignificant person.



On the following day, no one showed up in the clubroom.

Chapter 5 - Working Together to Help the Collapsed

Even though Taichi had an argument with Aoki and Nagase yesterday, he still went to school as usual.

To tell the truth, he thought he was too conceited and self-centred that he would be better off staying at home.

Nevertheless, he had a foreboding that he would end up with even more acute consequences if he really did stay at home.

There were still his sister and his parents at home. It wasn't entirely safe if he were to do something chaotic there.

Besides, Nagase would surely feel regretful if he did this. Whether it was her heart or other parts, Taichi didn't want to hurt her any more.

At the same time, he was skeptical since he didn't know what he would do outside. If he were prone to hurt Nagase when facing her, it seemed a more rash decision. Drenched in a forest with no exits, he didn't know where to go or which way was right.

Anyway, he still managed to go to school.

Nevertheless, he was perturbed by the fact that he would do anything chaotic if he were to approach anyone.

He had to bear the day and try to keep a distance away from anyone, putting his mind solely on his studies.

When Nagase approached him once, he intentionally stayed away from her. He had sent a message to her saying that he would try his best to avoid her.

He had also sent a message of apology for what he had said yesterday to Aoki.

Still, he hadn't received a reply after a prolonged time of wait.

When he and Aoki were having their physical education lessons, Aoki neglected him flatly.

Taichi couldn't summon his courage to go to the clubroom.

On the following day, Taichi adopted the same measure.

Never in such a long time did he just go to school without having a conversation with Nagase or Inaba Himeko. Back then, they would have a conversation for at least once in one of the recesses in one day.

Watase and his other friends asked him repeatedly in surprise, "Are you guys okay?" If their distance increased farther, probably their classmates would be more intrigued of what happened to them.

There was also Kiriya's problem. It was actually the biggest problem.

Kiriya hadn't gone to school, including yesterday and today. Since the chaos at the station, she had been absent for more than a week.

It was alleged—eavesdropped, actually—that Nagase had visited Kiriya alone yesterday, but reaped nothing. Nagase said she was planning to visit her again today.

Kiriya's friends in her class had also seemed to adapt similar measures, though their progress didn't go well, as they didn't know the true reason behind her absence.

It was necessary to think of solutions to her problem yet problems may occur if Taichi's desires were to be unleashed while he was at it; hence, it was more preferable to gather the club members and discuss the solutions together. Still, they might hurt each other if they gather together since their thinking process might easily make them emotional, especially himself, conceited and thinking only of things that mattered to himself.

He could easily hurt others. He knew doing this was the worst idea, yet the worse guy around was himself.

No dice: he couldn't do this.

He could only let time fleet as matters worsen day by day.

He couldn't summon his courage to go the clubroom today again.

Another week had passed.

He had locked himself in his room without going out in the weekends. His sister was very worried of his condition.

Afraid of the unleashing of desires, he spent time alone, time that felt way too long.

He had to think of what to do now, yet he couldn't be certain of what he would do during his contemplation.

He was unwilling of doing anything, nor was he willing to unwind himself.

There was this once he smashed his alarm clock before him when his desires had been unleashed.

This rage of wreaking things hidden in him appalled him.

He didn't know what he would become eventually.

He was afraid he would become someone that would hurt or damage something important to him.

If alone, he would sink in a swamp, unable to do anything.

Letting go of his superfluous thoughts, he went to school as usual on Monday.

He endeavoured to refrain himself from thinking of things that would grieve his heart. He let his thoughts wander afar and concentrated on things right in front of him.

To tell the truth, he couldn't control his thoughts in a pleasing way. Every time something happened, different thoughts would run across his mind.

Be it as it may, nothing induced by the unleashing of desires affected people around him.

Was it merely his luck? Or was he this kind of a person?

Taichi hadn't spoken to anyone in the club today too.



The sixth lesson of Monday was the class meeting time of class 1C. The president of the class—Fujishima Maiko—is standing in front of teacher's table, discussing the issues regarding the coming outdoor learning activity during the weekends. Taichi reminded himself to concentrate on what was happening at the moment.

"This discussion is getting boring. Wouldn't it be great if everything is decided for us at the beginning?" said Watase, sitting beside Taichi. The two of them were seating near each other at the first semester as well as the second.

"This activity needs everyone's participation, I guess."

Each class of the first year of Yamaboshi High School students could decide where to go and what to do in the autumn outdoor learning activity. It had been several times since they had discussed this in the class meetings, and this discussion was final.

"How exhausting. This is just another normal hiking anyway. It's definitely the teacher's slacking off to throw everything for the students to decide."

"Speak something constructive instead."

"Hey, Fujishima highness is here anyway. She's marvelous and pretty today too."

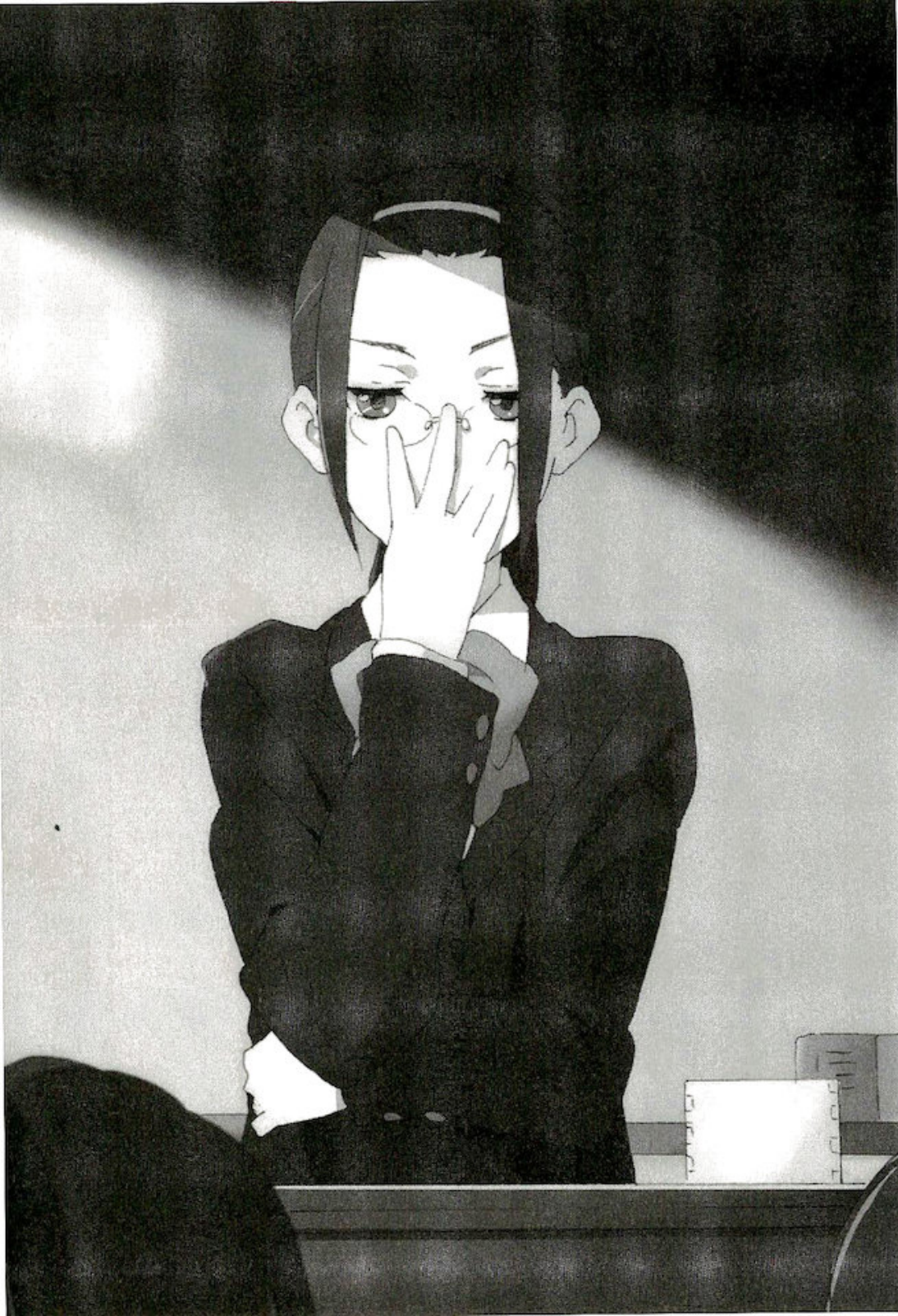
Watase had been mentioning Fujishima's name from time to time. Was he a super masochist?

"But why 'highness'?"

Taichi turned his head to look at Fujishima. Her hair bundled behind her head and her combed bangs were very neat and tidy as usual.

"So, let's talk about grouping, in which different groups will undergo the main activity of this trip—preparing curry rice."

Their class teacher, Gotou Ryuuzen, left after saying, "Thanks so much. I'll let Fujishima take on from here", and Fujishima took on briskly.



"I'm planning to have eight groups, with five group mates in each. I originally wanted to have ten groups, but since Class 1A will share our facilities, I've changed to eight so our demand wouldn't outweigh our resources."

"Will there be too many groups?"

"Won't it be better if there are more people in one group?"

Students began to throw in their own opinion (complaints).

"What are you talking about?" said Fujishima, shaking her head helplessly.

"It is of course important to sweeten our youth with memories of frolic with our friends, but are you satisfied with merely that? Aren't there some things more important?"

The class fell silent; everyone was concentrating on what Fujishima had to say.

"Yes. It's—love!"

As if pointing out the criminal like a renowned detective, Fujishima showed her finger energetically.

"When there are less group mates, everyone has to put his or her all into it. It is because of little group mates that would prevent the phenomenon—girls and boys talking to their own same genders—from occurring. They would then, gradually, begin to work together, and understand each other, or even have bodily contact! Do you really want this chance of germination of something vanish down the drain? Okay, let me ask again: do you want eight groups? Or less?"

"Let's have eight groups! Fujishima-sama!" exclaimed most boys in the class.

Watase even shouted in unison.

Nevertheless, when did Fujishima become such a character? She should be more like a strict class president. Wait? Why couldn't he think of how she looked when she was strict?

"I understand. Then, since there are twenty-eight people in either gender group, we'll have to split boys and girls into four three-person groups and four two-person groups respectively. If someone hopes to do so, we can also allow boys or girls to form pure-gender groups. I would make adjustments if some groups couldn't be formed. Let's start!"

Under Fujishima's announcement, everyone left their seats and began a heated discussion. Taichi was thinking of whom to pair up with. Let alone boys, should he find Nagase and Inaba to be in the same group as him to prevent the unexpected? Nevertheless, they kept their distance to prevent any hazards. No, if he were to think too much again, he would... He remembered when Nagase knocked onto the cabinet. It was nice to think that it was a small cut instead of any severe damage, but had she knocked into a window, some glass, or other stuff...

"Let's be in the same group, Yaegashi!"

"Cool. No problem with that," Taichi nodded assent to what Watase had said.

"Then, for the girls, I would like Fujishima!"

"Um.."

"Hey, maybe you want Nagase and Inaba together with you, but it's off limits this time. You have enough time flirting them in your club activities; shouldn't you give me a hand this time? Okay, I'll recommend a great dating place for

you next time. I promise," said Watase, shaking Taichi's shoulders, his eyes dead serious.

"When did I start flirting girls?"

Giving up what to think or do, Taichi tried to divert his attention on some other carefree topics.

"Watase, I should put it like this. Although I know you're basically popular among girls, and your love experience is ample, Fujishima isn't the one you want to get along with."

"That's why I want her. Besides, why do you speak like you know her very much?"

"Th-This is hard to explain on the fly."

As Taichi escaped Watase's question, he looked round the classroom, catching a glimpse of Nagase and Inaba having a conversation at some distance away from him.

"It's better if we're in the same group, Inaban."

"Keep a distance away from me; don't you remember what I said?" said Inaba, seemingly irascible.

"Y-You don't have to say this," said Nagase unsteadily.

The atmosphere seemed unwell.

"This for your own good."

"I'm also doing this for your good too..."

"I'm right, not you."

"That's hard to say!" shouted Nagase.

The students around her turned around to look at her with surprise. The unsteady atmosphere stirred the people within it. Had Nagase's desire been unleashed? Should I stop her? Even if I do...

"Stop ranting, you idiot! Tsk, please, get away from me."

Inaba's looked extremely apathetic, though her desire didn't seem to have unleashed. This made Tachi even more perturbed. Nagase gritted her teeth to bear the pain, her face at the verge of tears.

"I'm going to wash my face," murmured Nagase, saying this to herself, and left the classroom afterwards.

The classroom had fell into silence.

"Nagase..."

He ought to catch her, Taichi thought, rising up. At this moment, a clear and loud voice stormed the silent classroom.

"Inaba as well as Nagase will form a group with me," said the class president, Fujishi Maiko.

"What the hell?" protested Inaba.

"I'll be the one to blame if Inaba and Nagase doesn't get along with each other and destroy the ambience of our class."

"I don't have to listen to your crap!"

Inaba showed her agitation. Perhaps the word *self-control* had left her mind.

"As the class president, I have to safeguard the love and peace in our class."

"Be that as it may, you have no right to decide!"

"Surely I have. I'm the class president."

Fujishima looked like a comrade of justice, but Taichi didn't expect she would safeguard the love in their class too.

"Is it all right then, Yaegashi?"

"Eh? What?" Taichi made a weird noise out of surprise.

"Let me see...you're in the same group as Watase. Then, it's decided: Nagase, Inaba, Yaegashi, Watase, and I will form a five-person group. Is that all right, Yaegashi?"

"Why do you have to ask me..."

"Shut up."

It occurred to Taichi that it was Fujishima who asked him first—it seemed she was brilliant in too many ways recently.

"Tsk!" said, Inaba.

On the other hand, Watase patted on Taichi's shoulders, "Yaegashi, I'll treat you to juice next time—two cans, that is."



Their lessons were over once the class meeting ended. As Taichi thought of what to do, he looked around, only to see Inaba walking to Nagase's side. Although he couldn't hear what they're saying, they seem to be having a discussion. Nevertheless, Inaba quickly left Nagase with her back facing her.

"Inaba," Nagase called upon Inaba, but Inaba neglected her and left.

Nagase drooped her shoulders sorrowfully. Apparently, as her shoulders droop, her schoolbag slid along her shoulder and fell onto the floor. Nagase then slowly picked up the bag that was rolling on the floor. At this moment, she met her eyes with Taichi. Taichi quickly averted his eyes, feeling immediately afterwards something nasty was happening.

Why? Why did he avert his eyes? It was obvious his action was deliberately neglecting her. Although they shouldn't be too close in order to restrain themselves from hurting others, he had no need to neglect her. Wasn't this hurting Nagase too? It was completely nonsense. Taichi eyed his table, thought over it, and lifted his gaze gingerly: Nagase was walking out of the classroom, dejected and worn out. Taichi had a rush to call for her and comfort her, but when he thought that this rush was merely because his being unwilling to see her sorrowful face, he hated himself.

Taichi was in the classroom alone. The clock hung on the wall pointed at the number four. People heading for home had started their journey; people with club activities were heading for their clubs. It would be better if he returned home early to feel safe and sound. Although he knew this, he just couldn't stand up.

While he was idling away time, the door of the classroom was opened. Coming in through the door was the class teacher of class 1C as well as the

advisor of their club—Gotou Ryuuzen. Could it be «Heartseed»? Taichi thought for an instant.

“Oh, Yaegashi, what are you doing in the classroom all by yourself?”

It wasn’t «Heartseed». He was just the normal Gotou.

“Nothing. Really.”

Gotou walked in the classroom.

“Hey, let’s put that aside for now. Anyway, some other teachers complained to me that this teacher’s table is rocking around, so I asked the school to replace it with a new one, but they told me to replace it myself. Is this reasonable? This isn’t part of a teacher’s job, isn’t it? Although they seem they’ll help change it tomorrow, but the teacher who complained to me said he has lessons tomorrow. This teacher is very grouchy, you see.”

As he said endlessly, he lifted the teacher’s table and stopped.

“You look like you have nothing to do. Come on and help me out.”

As such, Taichi was carrying the teacher’s table alongside Gotou. Taichi faced the direction they were heading to refrain from looking directly at Gotou. Although Gotou didn’t do anything that upset him, but it wasn’t pleasant for him to remember «Heartseed» every time he saw him.

“Yo. It’s lucky to have you help me out. It would be dangerous to carry this thing along the stairs.”

“Oh,” said Taichi impotently.

Usually, Taichi could make out the difference between Gotou and «Heartseed», but now he couldn't treat Gotou with a normal state of mind. He was scared he would get angry at Gotou.

Turning over the corner of the corridor, they entered some other parts of the school.

"Yo," said Gotou, with a slight change in tone, "is something bugging you?"

Having being poked at the painful spot, Taichi nearly dropped the teacher's table and caught a good hold of it afterwards.

"Nothing. I'm fine."

"It is unconvincing to deny it with this dejected face. Are you ditched? Let me guess...Nagase or Inaba? Or could it be...Kiryama?"

"Nothing of this sort," Taichi said flatly. He wished things wouldn't always head to the love aspect.

"You should find a friend to discuss with you at such times."

"Eh?"

As Gotou sounded dead serious, speaking like a teacher, Taichi couldn't help replying in a surprised voice.

"I was saying—you should go and talk to a friend about it. Oh, don't ask me for suggestions! I won't care about love problems among high school students."

Taichi didn't respond, but he murmured what Gotou had said: "most problems could be solved if you talk to a friend about it."

When Gotou said this with such feeling, he didn't sound like the teacher who cared about nothing and acted like a student. He sounded like a dependable adult. Taichi's self-protection was softened a bit, and he let out a bit of what he was thinking, "But if I do discuss with my friends, they'll get hurt."

They wanted to discuss measures on helping Kiriya, but they instead hurt one and another to an extent they weren't certain of.

"What? Aren't friends people who hurt and trouble one another?"

Taichi looked at Gotou in surprise, but Gotou just looked at him with a face that told him 'what are you saying? It's obvious'.

"By the way, what do you mean by getting hurt just by discussion? Oh, is it a triangular relationship?"

As Gotou questioned and answered himself afterwards, he continued to nod his assent of what he had said to himself.

"Should you be in this situations, you might as well try not to escape and make everything clear and get a mutual understanding. There is always a way to solve problems if you discuss with each other directly. This is what friends do. Sometimes, you might fail, but if you don't speak it out and leave it alone, you'll regret for the rest of your life. With that said, isn't taking action and failing afterwards sound better?"

It wasn't looking at it optimistically, nor was it being afraid of the risks. It was believing that things would mend themselves at the end and adopt measures. Taichi listened to Gotou with attention.

"You might fail, but without some head-on arguments, you wouldn't end up becoming true friends. How should I put it? If you only play it safe, you may lose the most important thing."

His heads slowly sunk into Taichi's heart: would he lose the most important thing if he played it safe?

"Yah, by the way, don't I sound like a teacher when I say this stuff? Can't you be a bit touched?"

"If you didn't add this line, I may as well say bluntly I'm touched."

"What. At this moment, you should just bluntly tell me, 'I'm touched, teacher!' Or should I say...oh, hey, Fujishima, what are you doing here?"

Gotou called for Fujishima, who had met him along the corridor.

"I have something to deal with about the outdoor learning activity. Do you have some stuff to handle too, teacher? Thanks so much," said Fujishima formally.

"Seems like it. By the way, Fujishima, could you hear Yaegashi out?"

"Eh?"

"What?"

Taichi as well as Fujishima made a puzzled voice.

"I have been discussing with Yaegashi about how important friends are. So, Fujishima, can you listen him out? He seems to have something bugging him."

"Teacher, even when I'm the class president and you the class teacher, you can't tell me to do everything. Besides, Yaegashi is not my friend but my enemy."

So this was how Fujishima took Taichi as.

"What? Fujishima is the enemy? Hey, what kind of complicated relationship do you have? High school students recently are too avant-garde. Anyway, isn't it great that Fujishima has a relation to the problem? So, you guys should have a discussion."

"W-Wait, 'Go'!"

Even when Taichi called Gotou with his nickname, Gotou didn't listen to him.

Gotou, who seemed to have greatly mistaken, used his strength to lift the teacher's table that he and Taichi had been lifting together, and left Taichi and Fujishima.

Taichi and Fujishima were then left at the centre of the corridor where no one would pass through.

"What the heck? Forget it. Yaegashi, what is bugging you?" asked Fujishima, lifting her glasses at the same time.

"Nothing."

There was not much to discuss with Fujishima. Besides, he had once thought of pushing her away. It wasn't appropriate to get too near her.

Yet, Taichi stopped his thoughts for a moment.

It occurred to him he had been mistaken.

"No? Then leave it. Oh, can it be something pertaining to Inaba and Nagase?"

"Mmm..."

Being poked right at the spot, Taichi couldn't help changing his face.

"Okay! So, as the protector of peace and love in the class, I can't leave it alone. What's the matter? Let it out."

Fujishima had the daring of pushing him to explain; her eyes behind her glasses accentuated this horrifying pressure.

He might not be able to get away if he said nothing.

Besides, he might understand some things if he would reach out a step here.

After all, his mood wasn't bad now, and the violence in his heart had rested a bit. Even if his desires were unleashed, things wouldn't get too worse.

Taichi then tried to ask Fujishima the question he had asked Gotou.

"Let's see. If you'll hurt others when you discuss with them, what will you do?"

Having heard Taichi's question, Fujishima heaved a sigh. She seemed to be telling him: "Don't you even know that?"

"So, can't you just avoid discussing with others?"

"Yes, this is the most probable answer, but if no discussion is undergone, some things couldn't be done."

"Then discuss with them."

"But they might get hurt then."

"Let me ask you, Yaegashi. Which is the most important? Is it hurting the one you discuss with or finishing a task through discussion? What is your most important goal? What is the thing you treasure the most? You can try asking yourself these questions," said Fujishima continuously.

His most important goal.

The thing he treasured the most.

"When you can decide the most important things with faith and determination, other things will mend themselves at the end. On the contrary, in many occasions, if you don't decide, things will never get started," said Fujishima, showing a smile afterwards.

Seeing Fujishima, who had always been wearing an iron mask, smile, would trigger a subtle feeling of whether it was fine to see such a smile on her.

Nevertheless, Taichi reckoned it as a smile with great charm.

"By the way, I think humans essentially are creatures that will hurt one another. Anyway, it is your freedom in how to take it."

Humans essentially are creatures that will hurt one another. This is what Fujishima proposed and taken as a fact.

At this moment, Fujishima said, "Oh, sorry," and took out her phone. It seemed someone was phoning her.

"Hello? Oh, what's the matter? Okay, so you want to talk about some love agonies? Hand it to me."

Their reliable class president surely seemed busy.

"Okay, bye."

Closing her phone, Fujishima looked back at Taichi.

"Sorry, I've some things to take care of. Do you any other things you want to ask me?"

"No, it's fine. You should take care of those things now."

"Really? Then I'm off. You're welcome to ask me any questions anytime. If it will affect our class, I'll even aid you," Fujishima said elegantly, and left him.

Owing to her being too elegant, Taichi suddenly said, half-jokingly, "Fujishima, what actually are you?"

"Me?"

Fujishima turned her head, her hair bundled behind her fluttering along the wind.

She pushed her glasses.

"Let me think about it. I think I can be said as a preacher of love," said Fujishima with a serious look even when speaking something like a joke.

Fujishima left him gradually and disappeared after she took a turn at the stairs.

Taichi was left at the corridor alone.

Although he was alone, he didn't feel he was here all by himself.

The school broadcast came at this moment: "Mr. Gotou, Mr. Gotou. Please come to the staff room immediately."

It was a broadcast calling for Gotou. Taichi hoped it wasn't because he forgot to join the meetings.

Blowing some air out, Taichi took a step forward and began walking.

After the club members, including him, were affected by the phenomena induced by «Heartseed», they had always had discussions together.

It was surely understandable when one considered their situations.

Nevertheless, there were more than them in the world. They would affect people around them; they would ask people around them for strength and trouble the people around them.

Whenever the time, he would be connected to people of all sorts.

Taichi, at last, remembered this obvious fact he had almost forgotten.



Taichi entered the clubroom alone.

It had only been a few days of departure, yet he missed this place a lot.

He sat on the black sofa originally made for three.

The two long tables were aligned together, with no one sitting on the folded chairs surrounding it.

It had already been a fortnight since their last gathering.

Taichi breathed in deeply and potently.

He began thinking of what to do.

Normally, he would easily become dubious and worried of what he would do when he was thinking alone, but now he felt it was fine.

He knew it was deceiving to say he wasn't afraid, especially when his thoughts of helping others emerged from him, he might even hurt others, which was quite dangerous.

Nevertheless, it occurred to him that he might understand some things if he were to put harder work into it.

There was something beyond the brightness that Gotou and Fujishima shared.

He couldn't get lost, lest he would be unable to perceive matters that were important to him.

So he began thinking.

He had now been trying to keep a distance from everyone in the club. Why? This is because he didn't want to hurt anyone. He chose to abstain because due to this. Yet, was it really the right choice? Surely, perhaps the unleashing of desire might end while he was still abstaining, but no one could say for sure when it would end. Besides, had they gone to a stage they couldn't abstain any more? If it went on like this, would everyone ultimately shut himself or herself away? If this continued, they were bound to erupt because they would gradually be unable to withstand it. They must prevent this from happening. Also, what was the most important thing to him?

He was now endeavouring so as to prevent hurting anyone. This was of course an important thing. It was an important thing to do one's best to prevent hurting anyone near one. Nevertheless, was this his goal? Was it fine to just

accomplish this goal? Was he living just for this? Of course not. This couldn't be his goal. So, why was he endeavouring to prevent hurting anyone? This was because they were his comrades, and he cherished them. Certainly, the feelings within him were not purely feelings induced by his unwilling to see someone hurt, but why would still feel so painful when he was living not for the cause of preventing himself from hurting anyone? What should he do to solve this problem? What was the thing he truly hoped for? Was it simply everyone gathering together?

Kiriyama locked herself in her house due to her being shocked. Everyone had planned to solve this together, yet they ended up having a grudge against each other, and consequently, their bonds fell apart.

So, what should he do now?

What did he want the situation to transform into?

Which resolution was the most ideal?

For their bonds to connect again, and that they could work together to solve the problem of Kiriyama locking herself in her house—isn't this the goal he wanted to accomplish?

This was obviously the most ideal resolution, but why hadn't he endeavoured to accomplish this? This was because he had messed things up, forgotten it, and lost the most important thing.

What should he do when defending would only worsen things?

It was offence.

Offence was sometimes the best defence.

He was utterly unwilling to see anyone hurt or anyone prone to be hurt, so he would sacrifice anything to solve this problem.

He was opinionated.

Can opinionated people wish for these things? He didn't know. Nevertheless, it was fine to ask others if he didn't know. Should he be assured by this tricky situation, matters would only worsen. So, why not just put an end to it?

He had goals he pursued.

Would anyone concur to his desire?

Faces of Nagase, Inaba, Kiriya, and Aoki ran on Taichi's mind.

He wanted to be with everyone again.

He wished everyone could gather once again in this clubroom.

Perhaps he was headstrong, but what did he truly want to do now?

He hoped for a reunion.

What did others think?



Taichi decided to contact Nagase Iori.

She was the only person by far that hadn't yet actively kept her distance with everyone.

Taichi waited in the clubroom for Nagase.

Nagase seemed to be still in school; she said she would come immediately to the clubroom.

At this moment, the door was blasted loudly.

"Tai-Taichi!" shouted Nagase, gasping.

"Yo. You don't need to be in such a hurry."

"T-This is because you have something to tell me."

Nagase pressed on her knees with her hands, bending her body, seemingly exhausted. Taichi let her calm down before talking.

Nagase was gasping repeatedly.

There was an inevitable fear rushing into him when he confronted Nagase like this. Whatever excuses he could find, he might hurt Nagase by accident, or if there weren't the unleashing of desires...still, the fact that he had hurt Nagase wouldn't vanish. Besides, he might have hurt Fujishima. All of these were evidence he couldn't neglect.

It was the worst to hurt someone physically.

He was the worst because he enforced it.

Even if his actions were enforced because of the effects of the unleashing of desires, it wouldn't happen if he didn't want it. Once he were occupied by a thought, this thought would be the only thing that mattered to him—he couldn't even imagine what he would do then.

This was the person he was, although he was this person...

"So, Taichi. What is it?" asked Nagase, her breathing steadied.

Taichi looked at Nagase's face directly, meeting her eyes with his.

Those eyes that resembled limpid gems reflected Taichi's image.

Nagase had no intention to escape. She decided to look at what was going to happen.

What did he want to do?

Was this something that could be forgiven?

"Listen to me, Nagase. I'm extremely selfish and stubborn. Once I believe that something is right, I will rush into doing it without paying heed to anything else."

Nagase stared at Taichi calmly.

"Also, I'm those people who would be adamant in their opinion if they think they are right."

This was why he had hurt Inaba, had a quarrel with Aoki, and even hurt Nagase.

"So, I-I'm still self-centred now."

Taichi must reckon this bluntly.

"It's because I'm such a bastard that I kept my distance from everyone in order to prevent myself from hurting anyone. I think you know this."

He failed, however, and he was utterly discouraged and dismayed.

"But, after we had parted, I thought over it. I still want to be with everyone."

Was this a selfish and stubborn wish?

"But I have mentioned. I'm self-centred. I might hurt others sometimes. Of course, I would do my utmost to prevent myself from doing so. Still..."

Do humans have ways to live without hurting others?

"I really hate myself for my traits. I know for sure no one likes to get hurt, but I still want to be with everyone."

The bonds of the five were very important to Taichi.

"Should we separate because we don't want to get hurt, I would rather get hurt sometimes to redeem the opportunity to be with everyone. So, if you don't mind to get hurt sometimes, do you still wish to...may I still be at your side?"

Let me try to wish. Let me try to ask.

How does Nagase think of this?

While Taichi was speaking, Nagase stared Taichi's eyes without blinking.

Nagase sucked in her snivel. Her mouth was twitching, her eyebrows furrowed, her eyes welled with tears.

"Eh...ah...hey..."

Taichi was at a loss because he didn't expect her to cry.

At the next instant, Nagase sat down on the floor.

"Taichi, you're so mean!"

"Eh...Um...I'm sorry. My way of putting it..."

"It isn't this problem!" continued Nagase, sitting on the floor.

"I have always worked hard for a reunion, even when you guys call me to back off! Even when no one comes to the clubroom, I'll still visit Yui alone!"

Having been said by Nagase, Taichi knew one thing again.

He had always thought he was the person who had been thinking for everyone else and trying hard not to hurt anyone, but he hadn't even realised that Nagase was in such pain.

All of the care he thought had put for others proved futile.

"But if everyone will get hurt because of this, it couldn't be helped if we had to keep a distance...this was what I originally thought."

Nagase abruptly lifted her head. Although her eyes were red and puffy, she hadn't shed a tear.

"But you told me it that hurting one another is inevitable. Is this possible?"

Taichi didn't know the answer.

This depended on how Nagase and the others would take it.

Nagase lowered her head again.

Then, she lifted her head anew.

"But, I think it's possible," said Nagase, with a brilliant smile on her face.

Taichi was soothed by her smile, and he smiled himself, feeling a bit awkward for not smiling for so long.

He stretched his right hand, and Nagase rose with the aid of his hand.

The two of them stared each other at a very close distance, a distance that they could embrace should they reach out their hands.

Nevertheless, they quickly averted their eyes and stepped backwards. Yes, the distance they had was too embarrassing.

"Tai-Taichi. Do you plan to say the same thing to everyone else, so everyone could gather once again in the club room?" asked Nagase, her face slightly becoming sanguine.

"Yeah. This is my plan."

Taichi wanted to do this, and he hoped everyone wanted to as well—though this was only what he hoped for.

How should he determine what he was doing was right or wrong?

The answer was very simple: you only have to talk to people.

"Is that so? I still feel a bit troubled. I thought a lot of things too, and I've worked hard, yet you snatched my line all at once," said Nagase, pouting.

"Um...this is what you care about..."

"I'm just joking. I wanted to catch you off guard. I really don't care! It's the same for anyone to solve it."

He thought their relationship was in a frozen state, yet it was melted in a nick of time through communication.

Although they had a short separation, the connection between them still existed.

"By the way, Taichi, didn't you say you are very self-centred just now?"

"Y-Yeah."

"You're certainly self-centred."

"Wuagh!"

Indeed, he would still be shocked to hear someone say this to him.

"Although you're self-centred, most of the things you plan to do are correct, though there are times when there are problems in the way you carry them out. How should I put it?" said Nagase, cocking her head while she spoke.

"You're too upright, like a headstrong old man."

"So, that doesn't really mean I'm an old man, does it?"

Taichi had been a bit bothered by this since the time her sister said something of the sort to him.

"Ahaha. Maybe you're a bit like that."

During this time, he opened his mind to talk to Nagase, which was extremely satisfying. Taichi started to feel the situation they were in wasn't a big deal. Besides, they should be able to suppress the effects of the unleashing of desires to their lowest.

"However, I couldn't believe I would hear you say that it hurting one another is inevitable."

"I really don't like this. I really hate it, but why? This is probably due to the pain we are suffering induced by the way we choose to live."

Taichi was still a bit confused, but his will for everyone to gather was much more important than everything that was residing in his heart. Perhaps, this was how important the bonds of comrades are to him.

"Oh, one thing. I have to apologise to you officially. I'm sorry I pushed you away and hurt your head."

Nagase showed a troubled face as Taichi began speaking.

"How many times do you want to apologise? Wasn't it just an accident because you wanted me to give way? Besides, it was induced by the unleashing of desires."

No matter how many times he had to apologise, Taichi felt it wasn't enough.

"But I.."

"Taichi," interrupted Nagase.

"Didn't you say it's inevitable that sometimes we will hurt one another?"

"This is a bit different."

"Yeah, maybe. But it doesn't mind! This is because I, as the victim, say it's fine. It's all right if you be more careful next time."

Nagase smiled gently.

"Yeah. The most important thing is to never do this again in the future."

"This is what I'm saying."

"But can I do it? No. I should be working hard to employ it. I must work hard."

Although Taichi reckoned that friend would hurt one another, he didn't reckon that friends could hurt one another unconditionally.

He didn't know how strong his determination would play in the situation they were caught in, but if it was what he thought in his heart, a change might happen.

What person was he now?

What person would he become in the future?

"All right! Taichi, your plan isn't only to call me back to the clubroom, is it?"

Nagase grinned.

Seeing Nagase's smile, Taichi knew he could handle anything.

"Yeah. Of course. I hope everyone can be together again. I think it's better for everyone. Certainly, we still have to look at how they think."

"Great, but what should we do? Phone...no, it would be better if we meet in person, would it? So, let me find Inaba. After all, I had a quarrel with her in the classroom today."

"Okay. So I'll try to find Aoki. Besides, I think it'll be better if you talked to her one-to-one. I too had a great quarrel with Aoki, so I want to have a great talk to him."

"Yeah. You're right. Finally, the most important is Yui."

"Yes."

Kiriyama was the one hurt the most. Even if it was inevitable that they would hurt one another, this argument couldn't be pushed onto Yui.

Nevertheless, there would always be a way if they worked hard together. Although they didn't know whether they would succeed, Taichi believed they would, and thus he tried to work hard again.

The club could only stand when the five members were around.

"So, let's go. The next time we come back to the clubroom, I hope there all five of us will be here."

"Yeah!"

Taichi and Nagase knocked on each other's fists to elevate their spirits.



Taichi phoned Aoki. As Taichi sent a message that embedded the meaning, "I want you to have a chat with you directly no matter what", Aoki, though appalled by Taichi's vigour, agreed for a chat.

Since Taichi wanted to meet him earlier, he decided to go to Aoki's house.

They met at a riverbank beside a station that closest to Aoki's house.

Aoki was still wearing his uniform. Upon seeing Taichi, Aoki showed a wry smile in embarrassment and waved to him.

"Yo. It feels like ages since we last seen each other," commenced Taichi, approaching Aoki with small running steps.

Although they hadn't met for only four days, the distance of four days felt abnormally long in their hearts.

"Yeah. You're right."

Aoki averted his eyes.

Aoki had usually kept a cheerful attitude. It was rare that Taichi would tread into such an atmosphere with him.

What would happen? What would he say? What was I thinking? These scary thoughts monopolised his mind.

If he failed again, or if he were to have a quarrel...

The unleashing of desires would expose every bit of a man, but if they could still be friends even when exposed, then this phenomenon wouldn't worth mentioning.

Aoki once said to Taichi, "Who do you think you are?", and even criticised him for being a self-centred person. This saddened Taichi a lot.

Nevertheless, what he said was true.

Taichi had once thought that separating would be better than being hated too.

Still, he wanted to be friends with Aoki.

This was what he thought. What was left was how Aoki took it.

"Um, Aoki. I...said really bad words before. I'm arrogant and opinionated, and had always been thinking I was omnipotent and what I reckon was true; however, this was wrong. I can't wipe out my mistakes, but please let me apologise. Sorry."

Taichi lowered his head in apology.

Aoki didn't answer him straight away, and thus there were a pause between them.

Taichi lifted his head worryingly, wanting to know what would happen, only to see Aoki messing his hair around with his hands and facing the river.

"Ahh. Rats! I was indeed caught up! Wuaghh," cried Aoki ferociously.

"Hey, hey. Why are you so loud? Take caution of those around you."

Taichi fell into a panic. Aoki, on the other hand, smiled with ease.

"Aye, Taichi. Sit down and have a chat. Doesn't it feel like youth when two men chat while looking at the setting sun over the river? Let's 'youth' a bit!"

As a result, Taichi sat beside Aoki.

The sunlight reflected on the moving river, shining with gleam. Wind blew against Taichi's cheeks. Although it was a bit late, the temperature still felt comfortable.

"Aye. Actually, I wanted to apologise too! Though, I knew I was caught up once you phoned me," said Aoki, smiling.

"You send me a message of apology before to me, but I neglected it. How should I put it? What Iori said hit me greatly. It made me look like a stingy person. Oh, I don't mean that Iori said some bad stuff, it's just that I was stunned because her words got me."

"They got you?"

"It's because of my inability that I would be jealous of you who could save everyone. Even when I didn't want to acknowledge this and tried to

escape...especially myself...I thought I was thinking for Yui all the time, yet the person I thought the most was myself. This really hit me."

"Those so-called saving people are just a coincidence. Besides, I too said I would save KiriYama, but it was actually just for my own sake."

Phew. Both of them heaved a sigh.

"Taichi, I'm really sorry. It's because of my pointless jealousy that I said something bad to you. If you're willing to forgive me..."

"It's fine, Aoki. It's because what you said was true that I also need to concede."

He had to concede that he was this kind of a person.

"Also, I'm really an arrogant jerk. If we stay together, I think we might get into arguments frequently. Are you still willing to be together with me despite this? I hope I can play and chat with you in the clubroom again."

Aoki eyed Taichi's face and winked several times.

"Oh, do you still have to say this at this time? Or should I say this feels like words between couples? It's really embarrassing! I don't have that interest, mind you."

"Neither do I!"

They laughed together this time.

"Sigh, but I'm really useless. I had a grudge against you, yet the one who summon his courage to apologise is you."

"Still, you didn't say anything wrong, Aoki."

"To think deeper, doesn't this mean you are always thinking about how to save Yui? I feel that is something really incredible. Besides, if your desires weren't unleashed and can stay calm, I think you wouldn't adopt a way that would hurt others."

"You can put it that way if we look it at positively. By the way, a similar thing goes for you, Aoki. You did that for Yui, didn't you?"

"You can say so, but perhaps it ended up for myself. To act for someone flawlessly, however, is essentially impossible. These things could only be done for those benevolent people who have understood everything," murmured, Aoki, setting his gaze afar.

Aoki would sometimes say such sophisticated things.

Though he looked frivolous, he truly knew what was important.

Whatever they do, they were still immature people.

They couldn't live just for a person.

Nevertheless, they could learn to accept it.

"You're right about its ending up for ourselves, but we still..."

Taichi stopped half, and Aoki continued his words, "want to help Yui, right?"

Aoki slapped Taichi's thighs.

"All right. Then, let's think of ways to help her! Oh, if our desires get unleashed in the middle of our discussion...anyway, these things don't matter any more to me now."

"Yeah. Also..."

As soon as Taichi spoke, he waved his head and said it was nothing.

He wanted originally to contact Nagase who was finding Inaba. If she succeeded, then they'll find a place for the reunion. Nevertheless, he decided to put it on hold first. Nagsae would find him if things worsened anyway.

It occurred to him that he would be able to do something if were to work together with Aoki. If they were really able to solve Kiriyama's problem, then it would be great. If they couldn't, they could then come up with new ways or ask for help from others.

"So, let's think about how do deal with Yui's problem. No, saying that we'll 'deal with' her problem is a bit arrogant, should I say: what do we hope that Yui will do?" Aoki brought up the matter anew.

"I still think that letting her is going out. After all, we don't know when will the unleashing of desires stop."

In the worst-case scenario, if she were unwilling, they could let her to keep a distance from them. It was fine even if she didn't come to clubroom.

It was, at least, better than letting her lock herself in her room without even coming to school.

"It'll be great if we won't hurt someone because of this. Yeah."

They were agonised suddenly.

"Aye, although it sucks to say this first, is this too difficult for us two? I think Kiriyama should also do her bit."

If they could find a measure that would solve the problem at its root, it was fine; however, looking at what they were in, they knew it was difficult. This was why Kiriya ought to have the cognition to bear risk.

"You're right!"

"Besides, we already know that we could suppress the effects of the unleashing of desires by paying attention to our mood swing, although we would fail 'sometimes'."

Aoki corrected himself. He was correct.

"Can't we cease Kiriya when we are at her side?"

"Do we have a way to suppress her?"

It looked impossible, as what they were dealing with is Kiriya Yui, once a genius karate girl.

Taichi continued, maintaining his determination, "Wouldn't it work if we just say 'It'll be fine if we be careful enough!'"

"Eh, what's wrong with that determination of the Showa Period? Taichi, are you using your brain?"

"Ah, I'm being said by Aoki."

How shocking.

"Or should I say, thanks to your theory last time that Yui could overcome her trauma. Oh, but is it because of the marvelous act of kicking the fatal spot? To tell the truth, what type of logical deduction that you used to come up with these ways?"

"At those times...I think it's because of the special phenomenon of the personality exchange. Or to say it another way, it could only happen because of the personality exchange."

"What an incredible and positive way of thinking it! You could think backwards!"

Aoki exaggeratedly bent backwards.

"But there's nothing we could only do this time...ah!"

Aoki's whole body fell backwards.

He raised his hands, as if crying in joy.

"What's it?" asked Taichi.

"I-I think I've caught some inspiration."

"R-Really?"

"Yeah. I don't know whether it will work successfully. S-So, I need to think of a way to say it! Mm, if only Inaba was here, it would be great. She's great at saying false stuff, you know."

Having heard Aoki's words, Taichi, after some reluctance, decided to speak what he had in mind, "I'm also great at it!"

Although this wasn't much to be proud of, Taichi still tried to say it.

It was due to this vigour in him.



Make hay while the sun shines—with his in mind, Taichi and Aoki decided to take action immediately.

They arrived at Kiriyaama's house a bit late at night.

They met Kiriyaama's mother at the door and chatted for a while. She seemed to have forgotten to buy something, so she was going out to the supermarket to buy them.

Compared with what she looked like last week, Kiriyaama's mother looked a lot more skinny—even Taichi who had only seen her for some time could realise. How much pain was she feeling? How worried were Kiriyaama's other family members?

He must save Kiriyaama for these people around her, Taichi thought.

Receiving Kiriyaama's permission, they entered Kiriyaama's house. Passing through the gates and going to the second floor where Kiriyaama's room was situated, they found out that no one was at home, though Kiriyaama's mother didn't seem to care.

Taichi heaved a sigh inside. He was eased by the fact that they weren't other people in the house since their job would then be easier.

Coming to the door, Taichi and Aoki looked at each other.

Although it was strange for Taichi to think like this himself, he thought that it was a brilliant scheme thought up by they two.

Aoki's face was brimming with determination like those soldiers going to the battlefield. He nodded, and Taichi nodded in response.

Aoki knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" Kiriyaama's little voice came through the door.

"It's Taichi and I."

"Come in."

The same thing happened the second time they came in. Anyway, Kiriyaama didn't really mind letting them in.

This was the third time they went to Kiriyaama's room.^[8]

The two of them looked around Kiriyaama's room they had gradually become familiar with.

The colours in the room were bright, having a lot of adorable stuff. Although the room had the taste of a girl, the air was sullen and dull.

Kiriyaama looked worn out, as if a dream, vanishing light.

They could look through her sports clothes that her skin was very wan, much like a patient. They couldn't find the usual healthy and lively trace in her.

"It's been ages since we've seen each other," greeted Taichi.

"Yeah."

Though she spoke so small a voice that couldn't be heard without extra attention, she still, at the least, replied to Tachi.

"Yui. Come outside. Come to school. It doesn't mind," said Aoki, throwing this line firstly.

They didn't observe what would happen.

They didn't do any small actions.

They weren't so witty.

"What? Why are you coming to say this again? I've repeated myself a good few times. I don't know when I would fight others. There's no way I'll go out. Although I think what Inaba said was right, I just couldn't..." murmured Kiriyaama with a painful and sorrow face.

"Be that as it may, you can't just lock yourself in your house. You can't stay like this forever," said Taichi.

"But...but..."

Kiriyaama only lowered her head and kept on saying 'but' so many times she had lost count.

Everything was same as before.

Now was the time for the change—to turn over the tables.

Taichi backed off a large step to let Aoki take care of it. He looked at them from a side. He wasn't the protagonist today but an audience to aid them.

It wouldn't mean anything if it wasn't Aoki who said this.

"You're too mindful of these things. It would be fine if it's Yui. It won't result in those things. Even if it will, we will still make it through!" said Aoki flatly with strong determination.

Taichi's support without words seemed to have reached them and lifted Aoki's determination.

"S-Stop joking around. Even when I want to stand strong, I'm still hopeless when my desires are unleashed. You understand this too, don't you?"

"No. This isn't it. No matter how strong our desires are, no matter what happens, no matter what it will result in, if only we can really restrain ourselves from not doing so with our whole determination and strength, we won't really do it!"

Aoki not only used words but also his face and his whole body to convey it to Kiriyaama.

"Won't the unleashing of desires suppress those thoughts? Whenever it occurs, the thought of suppressing it would be futile. Isn't this what we are facing?"

"It is, but it's actually not!"

"Eh?"

Kiriyaama frowned, her head tilted in doubt.

"It's fine because it isn't!" repeated Aoki.

"What?"

Kiriyaama frowned harder.

Rats. It looked like Kiriyaama couldn't get a single idea of what Aoki meant.

Or should Taichi say Aoki said it with too much force that made his efforts a bit useless. Was this all right? Should Taichi interrupt? It felt especially nervous to be the audience.

"If I can really prove it's fine, that we can suppress things we don't want to do, then you will go outside, go to school, and come to the clubroom, okay?"

"Wu...eh...If I can suppress it too...then..."

Then before Kiriyaama could finish...

"Okay. Let's make this a deal! I'm on it!"

Aoki grinned, showing his white teeth, saying, "I'm not boasting, but I really like you, Yui! I really like, extremely like, super like!"

At this moment, Aoki's coolness had reached a surprising stage.

Probably this confession was too sudden, Kiriyaama didn't blush but just listened to him carefully.

"Also, I'm not boasting, but I'm a bit lecherous. No. To be honest, I'm really lecherous. You can count me as being quite lecherous or even extremely lecherous!"

Aoki had blown his image away in an instant.

Though this was for the plan, he looked cool if it didn't include this last line...

"So, under this situation of my desires being unleashed—to be frank—it's no surprise I will push you, Yui, down whenever the time!"

Aoki said the worst line with an ultimate smile.

Kiriyaama, blanked originally, now gradually becoming blushed.

"W-What are you saying! You're the worst!"

As she screamed, she threw the pillow at her side at Aoki, hitting Aoki's stomach directly.

This was what he deserved.

"N-No. Yui. I haven't finished yet. There's still more to this!"

Aoki stopped for a while, and then he stood upright anew.

"Eh. Let me think...right! It's no surprise I will push you down whenever the time, but I will use my strong will—my ironclad determination that will never do those things—to win my desires!"

This was a declaration that was only valuable under this situation.

"When I win those desires and succeeded in not pushing you down, then it'll prove that even when we have desires, we could transcend it with the strong will of not doing it!"

It was a line that was meaningful only because Aoki said it.

"A-Are you an idiot? I don't know what you mean. No, probably I can..."

"Am I right? So, Yui, let's go spend the night in a hotel! If I didn't you push you over in the hotel, then you have to trust what I'm saying is true!"

This plan was certainly surprising. Taichi could only be calm because he was only the audience.

For a strange reason, everyone was so embarrassed his or her faces was burning.

"Don't count me in! Why do I have to go to those places and risk the chance of being pushed down like an idiot!"

Perhaps she was agitated, her voice amplified gradually.

"I don't want this. I won't do it! Why are you so sure it wouldn't happen even when your desires could be unleashed?"

Aoki only bluntly answered the infuriated Kiriyaama, "This is because I don't want you to get hurt no matter what! This is because I truly like you!"

Kiriyaama stopped moving.

Her face was stiff, and her face became plain.

"I have confidence that my desire of not hurting you is definitely stronger!"

As a result, one would only act for oneself—the person who acknowledged this still proposed that he would prioritise others' feelings before himself and that he could do this—not because of his vigour but what he came down to after logical deduction.

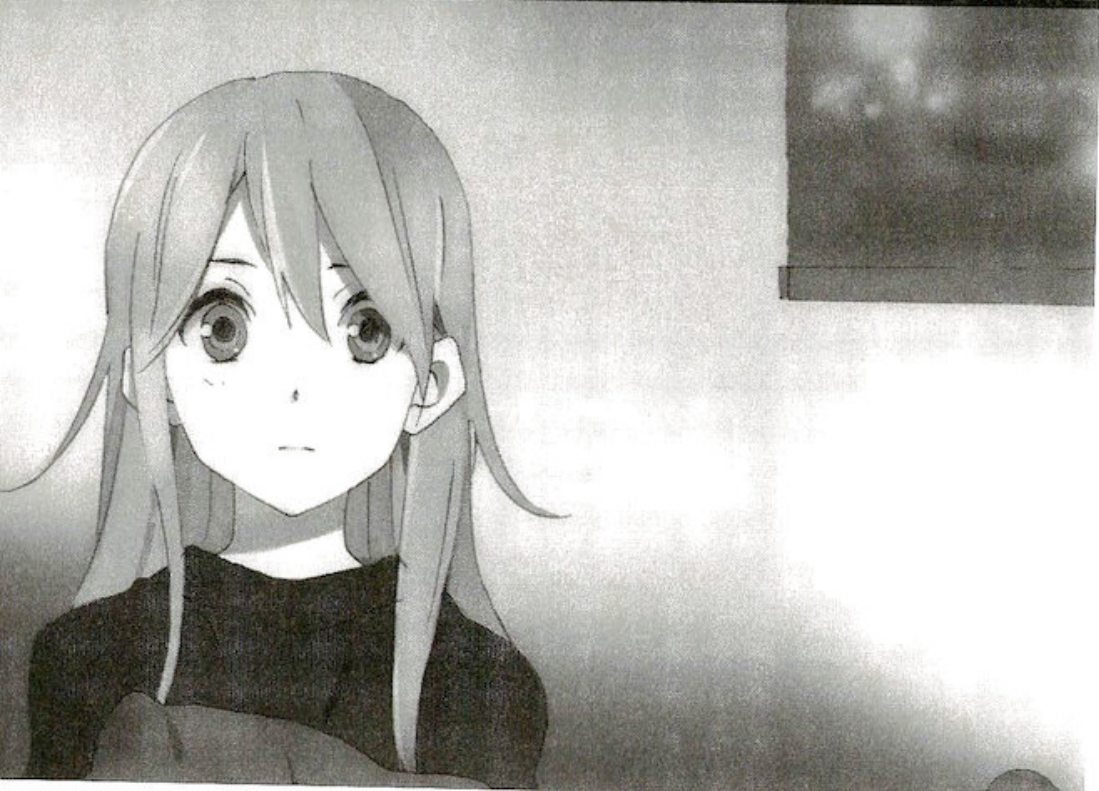
He couldn't say this if he didn't reckon the feelings of others in his own heart.

How many people in the world put their words as far as to this?

Although affected by the unleashing of desires, Taichi still hit Nagase. He didn't feel good about this, though he hadn't the right to speak the same thing like Aoki.

He hoped he could say those words confidently one day.

"Furthermore, although this wouldn't happen, if I really lost to the unleashing of desires, you won't get pushed down because at the instant I tried to push you down, it's when you'll punch me all over!"



"T-This is even more unwanted. I don't want to hurt anybody, including you," Kiriyaama squeezed some words with her changed tone that was mixed with tears.

It was a sorrowful and gentle tone.

"That's only what happens when I lose. Nevertheless, isn't it normal for men whose desires veil their conscious to receive punishment? Even though I won't lose anyway...hahaha!"

Aoki laughed at Kiriyaama with a bright voice that sounded a bit too intentional.

As if infected, Kiriyaama laughed while crying.

Although her face collapsed by her tears, her smile was still extremely beautiful.

Damp and warm air filled the room.

"Otherwise, you can dress a bit erotic! Then it'll be more convincing when my mission succeeds! Whether it is mere underwear, bunny outfit, or naked apron..."

Aoki began to think up of weird things strongly.

Wasn't this a bit too much?

Just when Taichi was thinking...

"Stop your weird hallucinations!"

The tissue box that was originally placed on the shelf flew across the air.

"Ouch! It's the corner of the box!"

"Idiot, idiot! You big idiot!"

This scene was just as Taichi expected. He couldn't help bursting out in laughter.

"Tai-Taichi. It isn't the time for jokes!"

Having been going through intense pain that he rolling over the floor, Aoki faced Taichi anew.

"Good. It's good! So, Taichi, speak some false words to wrap this up."

"Don't say it's false words before you let me speak! At least say it's a word of wisdom!"

"Aha. Ahahaha! You guys are really idiots. Hahaha!"

Their stupid conversation let Kiriama laughed.

They felt they hadn't heard her laughter for a long time.

"Haha. I laughed so much I feel tired. So, let me hear your false words."

"Why are even you saying they're false words!"

What the heck? Now, what expression should he have to say it?

"Yeah. I think, fundamentally, the strongest desire at the moment gets to be unleashed, right?" said Taichi, driving his spirits up.

"Yeah. Seems so."

"So, although Kiriama wreaked some havoc at the station in that incident, did she really hurt anyone before that?"

"There was times it happened when I was having karate competitions or practices, but it's different from hurting someone intentionally. So, this is my first time."

"Great. This is what I thought. So, Kiriyaama doesn't know how it feels to hurt anyone until now. Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"But you now know how dangerous it can become. Not only others but also yourself could feel the pain. Besides, even if you don't stay at home, you could still embrace the thought of not wanting to hurt anyone."

It was because the once showed their feelings that could feel the pain they hadn't until now.

"So, the strong desire of not wanting to hurt anyone could win any desire of punching the hell out of anyone, right? I think so too, and strongly, but if you were to call it a desire..."

Although it seemed right at first glance, they weren't sure. After all, they hadn't completely grasped the unleashing of desires. Of course, they wouldn't know whether this was correct.

Nevertheless, the most important thing was to let Kiriyaama accept this.

In other words, it was helping her to summon her courage to take out this step.

So, it was all right whether it was false words are just playing around with words.

The most important thing was that they could change from these false words.

"Actually, I once hurt Nagase because of the unleashing of desires."

"Eh..."

Kiriyama was speechless.

"Eh, I didn't really directly hit her, but I still hurt her. Perhaps someone would think I was the one that caused it...though it really makes me depressed...and made me wanting to keep my distance from others originally...I think I understand your feelings a bit."

Out of their expectation, Taichi's face twitched.

As a response, Kiriyama showed a tender face, as if telling him through her face that it was fine.

"Even when I was like this, I still wanted to be with everyone. Although I'm as stubborn as an idiot, I want Kiriyama to have a feeling like mine. So, why not try to believe in yourself?"

Taichi hoped Kiriyama could have the same wish as his.

"So this is what you wanted to say. Good job, Taichi! Nevertheless, what you are saying is only a hypothesis without a proof. So, as I had said, Yui, let's go to the hotel!"

It was great that only Kiriyama was at home.

"Go to hell! Even if we go to the hotel, we might not experience the unleashing of desires!"

"Then stay for more nights! We'll continue until you say it's enough or that you understand!"

"Ahah. I understand. I understand! I'll go then."

"What?"

"What in the seven hells?"

Taichi and Aoki were both shocked.

"I mean I'll go to school," said Kiriyaama with a weak voice.

Slightly lowering her head, Kiriyaama averted her eyes. Her cheeks, as if feeling regret, were dyed pink.

"S-So you mean you won't lock yourself in house any more?" asked Aoki, worried.

"Th-This is because it's a hundred times better to go to school than to go to those places with you."

"A hundred times? At least change it to ten times!"

"The problem isn't here, okay?" murmured Taichi at a side.

"But I'm still a bit afraid. Or should I say, I don't know what I would become. So, if there is any danger, please think of ways to cease me," requested Kiriyaama with a serious tone. She looked like she was kneeling to them, as she was lowering her head while kneeling on her bed.

Taichi immediately sounded a voice of approval, but Aoki interrupted him.

"The request of 'please cease me' isn't quite right, is it?"

Kiriyaama crossed his hands over his chest, swung her fingers around over his face, and clicked his tongue.

"Wh-What do you mean it isn't right?"

Kiriyama's eyes became soaked up.

"What are you doing!" Taichi couldn't help shouting at Aoki.

"N-No! Yui. You should say it like this! Look closely!"

Aoki moved his lips, sending words to Kiriyama without making a voice.

Kiriyama stared at Aoki's mouth. Then, astonished, she said softly, "May you protect me?"

"My pleasure."

The tall and thin knight kneeled down in front of the puzzled princess whose chestnut hair was scattered on the bed and lowered his assent.

It was true that one would not hurt anyone when one was alone.

One would only hurt others when one was not alone.

Nevertheless, there were a lot of things that could only be acquired through being with others.

There were things that one could not do oneself.

Yet, with concerted efforts with others, they could save someone.

Of course it wouldn't succeed every time.

They couldn't make a strike back or resist it.

Notwithstanding, they could still gather these small powers, lest they should succumb to «Heartseed».



I was the worst.

I was trapped in the worst situation.

Anyway, I had accumulated some stress, and my vigour was exhausted each day due to insufficient rest. I was both mentally and physically exhausted.

And the most important thing was me not staying there could create such a big hole in my heart.

The feeling of losing something I could not mend was torturing me, making me impatient.

This was why I carelessly pushed it off without a bit too much strength.

My only intention was to keep a distance from them so I wouldn't hurt them, but I hurt them in another way. It was totally futile. I threw good money after bad.

Nevertheless, wasn't this better than letting them approach myself?

Wasn't this better than letting those to be with such a bad person?

Today, I lost a mechanical pencil I had recently bought.

I thought I could have forgotten putting it into my pencil case, so I headed back home and checked in my room. Although I found myself trouble at school that day, I could still remember this.

The problem was that I couldn't find it after a prolonged search. It seemed I had lost it, so I went to a nearby stationery shop to buy another one.

Having entered the shop and found the one I wanted to buy, suddenly a thought popped up in my head.

It was dumb to buy another pencil I recently bought that was so expensive (200 yen) and that could be used for a long time.

My desire was unleashed at this time.

When my conscious returned to my body, I was already holding an unpaid commodity, tens of yards away from the store.

When I returned normal—that is, after the unleashing of desires had stopped, though stumped, I still returned to the store and placed the commodity back onto the shelf, and thus I left the store without buying anything.

I barely reached home with shaky footsteps.

I didn't want to believe it.

I really did have the thought of spending money to buy it was stupid, but I shouldn't have really thought of acquiring it by stealing.

It was a crime.

Even though there wasn't such a law, it was unpermitted ethically.

Nevertheless, I seemed to have mistaken.

My personality was helpless. It was a twitched personality that could only revolve around my own personal gain.

It was pointless of making an excuse that it was because of the unleashing of desires that caused my heart to denature.

This was because no one had done such a thing.

So, this was only my problem.

I was, in fact, this kind of a person.

This kind of a person shouldn't approach them any more.

When I was still thinking, Iori phoned me.

I didn't have the mood to receive the call, so I decided to neglect it.

As a result, she then came to visit me.

Feeling hopeless, I could only let her in my room.

First, we apologised to each other for our misdoings.

After that, Iori said she hoped I could go back to the clubroom.

She said everyone would perhaps have quarrels and hurt one another, but she still wanted to be with everyone regardless.

It made me very happy for Iori to say this.

Hurting one another was fine—this was wise probably, but certainly there was a limit to this.

Although I didn't know how were others doing, I knew I was too dangerous when my desires could be unleashed at any moment.

Besides, the reason why I kept my distance with others was more because I didn't wanted to be hated instead of not wanting to hurt others.

I didn't know what I, who always thought of personal gain, would do.

I told Iori I hoped she could give me some time to adjust my feelings.

One day I would definitely return to the club—though I wasn't certain of whether I was able to do it.

Having heard of my reply, Iori showed a painful and sorrowful face; still, she said she was willing to respect my decision.

Iori asked for a confirmation of whether I hated them. I then replied with a smile that was impossible.

Finally, Iori left by saying they would be waiting for my return.

While feeling sorry, I heaved a sigh for thinking that I could deal with it after much effort. When I realised that me being able to deal with it monopolised most of the joy in my heart, I immediately fell into self-disgust.

By the way, what was it Iori? I thought the annoying Taichi would be the one to come at these times, although Iori did mention she had been discussing something with him.

Strange.

Why did such things bother me?

Chapter 6 - Found Out by Accident

On the following day, Kiriyama abided to her declaration she made the previous day and came to school.

Upon hearing Kiriyama's arrival, Nagase immediately fled away from the classroom to embrace Kiriyama. Though Kiriyama was embarrassed and puzzled, she looked she was elated.

It had been a long time since Taichi, Nagase, Kiriyama, and Aoki chatted with each other.

Although Kiriyama was absent for more than a week, her classmates gave her a warm welcome.

The only deplorable thing was that Inaba was late for school, so she wasn't here to witness it.

"Ah. If only Inaban could also come to the clubroom," murmured Nagase in the clubroom after school.

Including Kiriyama, everyone was willing to return to the clubroom. Only Inaba was left out.

"I've tried to talk to her. She's sensitive and loves to care for others. Anyway, she still needs time to adjust her feelings. It isn't quite right to force our expectations on her now."

They had to understand that what they were thinking might be important to them but of less importance to Inaba.

Still, Taichi hoped Inaba could come back to the clubroom as soon as possible.

"Hi."

Aoki opened the door. For some reason, He showed a wry smile.

Kiriyama Yui also came in. She looked dismayed; her footsteps were unstable; her hands were holding quite a big plastic bag.

"What's the matter, Yui?" asked Nagase, frowned, a bit worried.

"I've bought too much stuff."

Kiriyama poured all of the contents in the plastic bag onto the table.

As such, coming out was chocolates, potato chips, pineapple buns, dorayakis, pudding, and a spate of snacks and sweet bread.

"Ara Ara. I was just not paying attention. Should I call this the desire for food or desire for material? Anyway, a kind of desire popped up and resulted in this," Aoki explained, throwing a glance at Kiriyama, who was sitting on the folded chair, dejected.

"Wuagh. Is it fine with your wallet?"

"I just got my allowance and put it all in my wallet. Wuaghh. How can I survive this month now?"

"I don't know whether I should call this luck or misfortune," murmured Taichi, looking at Kiriyama who was in distress.

"By the way, Yui, what should we do with these?" asked Nagase.

"What should we do? If I bring them back home, my family members will nag about them. Although I wanted to return them, the owner of the shop told us we bought them in front of many students, so we couldn't..."

In the middle of his speech, Aoki stopped and widened his eyes, as if he was at a loss.

Was this the unleashing of desires? Just when Taichi thought of this, Aoki suddenly shouted, "Give me the roasted, sauced meatballs!"

His desire for food might have been unleashed that made him a roasted, sauced meatball monster.

"What? No! Don't take my things! Ah. You idiot!"

Aoki and Kiriya started to pull the box of the roasted meatball on either side.

"What? It's a desire like this? I thought anything weird might run out, making me so nervous just then..." Nagase heaved a sigh of relief.

"Nevertheless, it's normal for one to want to eat the great amount of food before them..." Nagase stopped moving, the calmness leaving her.

Could it be that...

"That sandwich is mine!"

Nagase flew onto the table, snatching the sandwich away from the pile of food.

"Hey, Nagase, calm down!"

Despite Taichi's reminder, Nagase couldn't stop, certainly.

"Why is Iori like this too? I don't mean I don't want to give it to you guys! I'll distribute..."

Kiriya let go of the meatball box she was holding onto against Aoki.

“Wuaghh!”

Due to losing the force that pulled him back, Aoki fell backwards.

Kiriyama widened her eyes, freezing all in a sudden, and violently tore the bag in front of her.

“I’m hungry. Choco pineapple bun!”

Kiriyama started to devour the choco pineapple bun.

Everyone was devouring the food in front of him or her crudely and vigorously, as if they were having a small-sized big eater competition.

“Hey. To have three people having the same desire unleashed is too...anyway, it’s great that these desires are harmless...”

[Eat it!]

He couldn’t believe it, but it was a voice he was hearing in his mind.

He couldn’t cease it merely by his own will. This rush of desire throbbing in him was detestable.

If even he had his desires unleashed, who could wrap this up?

Yet, Taichi’s thought was futile...

“I-I want chocolates! Give me the chocolates!”

“Ahah. You suck...” murmured Kiriyama.

Their desires ended within three minutes.

Due to this short time, they couldn't finish eating all of the food; and because they were devouring the snacks under the control of their desires, the result was unsightly—food was scattered everywhere.

Bread and snacks that had only been bitten a few times piled up in the clubroom.

"What should we do now? Ahaha."

Nagase showed a tensed smile.

"The only thing we could do is to finish eating them, isn't it?" said Aoki.

"Let's split the bill for the food," said Taichi.

"Sure! Great. Then, let's have a party! Let's boost out spirits!" Catching a glimpse at Kiriyama, who was dejected, from a side, Nagase could scarcely make a bright voice.

After a while, Kiriyama, originally looking at down, moaned lowly, and then lifted her head and slapped at the table potently.

"I have to go crazy! Eat all you want! I'm going to eat too!"

After they bought the beverages (which they hadn't bought in the first run), they started their fest.

"Okay. Should we make this a pre-celebration for the hike?"

"Why do we have to celebrate for outdoor learning activities?" Taichi retorted to Aoki's suggestion.

"Ah. By the way, although classes get to choose where they will be going to, our class, class 1C, will go the same place as your class," said Nagase.

Kiriyama replied, "Eh! Really?"

Although each class decides their own sites, the places the classes choose were similar, so these occurrences were common.

"Anyway, it's quite gratifying, but we shouldn't act together because this is a class activity, should we?"

Speaking of which, due to Fujishima's forced plan, Taichi, Nagase, and Inaba would be in the same group to cook curry rice.

Inaba was still trying to keep a distance from them. Not only did she refuse to come to the clubroom, she also gave a cold response when they greet her.

Certainly, Taichi knew Inaba had her own thoughts, but Taichi just hoped that this outdoor learning activity could become an opportunity for Inaba to slightly change her thoughts.



Yesterday, something seemed to have happened between them.

I had been thinking since yesterday of whether I should stop going outside.

After having carelessly stealing something in a shop, I had always been thinking negatively. I was afraid of doing much more serious things, so I would think of skipping lessons and shut myself away at home.

Yet, upon hearing from Iori that Yui had already started going to school, I changed my mind.

Just then I had been belittling her by saying it would be detrimental to shut yourself at home, but now I want to shut myself away at home—how laughable.

Besides, if I were to shut myself away at home, those people would come to my house. Once they do that, hell knows what would happen.

I only thought of protecting myself again.

Upon arriving at school, Yui came to talk to me.

She even especially told me that I didn't need to feel regretful for having said bad things at her.

Be that as it may, I still apologised for my misdoings, and she smiled and said my words were right. The smile she had wasn't faked but a smile that came from her heart.

Taichi, Iori, and Aoki also came to talk to me.

Everyone told me I didn't have to force myself to go to the clubroom, though they still hoped I could.

They were willing to prepare a place to accommodate me.

At the same time I felt gracious, my unwillingness to lose it grew stronger.

I didn't have the confidence to go there at the moment.

As such, having thrown a glance at the recreational building where they should be now gathering, I went home alone.

Having returned home, Inaba Himeko, bored, was killing her time on the Internet.

She started to remember some past events.

It wasn't long ago. She wouldn't believe in anyone. She built a wall that blocked away any unnecessary people in school to form relationships with her. She didn't even have a single friend.

As she flipped her middle school memorial book, she couldn't find a single good shot of herself, regardless it was a photo of her or with others. There were only a few shots that shot a part of her.

There were no traces of her frolicking with her middle-school friends.

It was in her apprehension, as she hadn't experienced any frolicking with others.

This had never bothered her, but for some reason beyond her apprehension, her chest would feel pain whenever she thought of this.

When did she become this weak?

After the sky had turned dark, her mother knocked on her door.

Expecting something normal, she found her mother said the otherwise, "Your class teacher has come. He said he has something to tell you. You didn't mess up anything, did you?"

She thought it was just a prank, but that guy really appeared behind her mother.

He had the body of Gotou Ryuuzen, the class teacher of 1C as well as the tutor of their club.

His pupils were more dilated than usual, his shoulders more shrugged than usual, but compared to the authentic Gotou, there was seemingly not a trace of anguish on her face.

«Heartseed», who has a dead-fish's eye, was standing there.

Anyway, as Inaba persuaded her mum it was nothing and pushed her out of the room, while reminding her several times not to bring in any tea or snacks, Inaba closed the room after her mother acquiesced and nodded her assent. Inaba then locked the door and faced that guy.

"Why are you coming here?" Inaba complained, aware of not making too loud a sound.

"Ahah. Being careful of not letting anyone hear this is a wise act."

That guy turned the atmosphere instantly into the usual one where «Heartseed» would evoke. It was an atmosphere of lack of vigour and energy that came from his whole body.

The appearance of «Heartseed» made Inaba's room in one instant a different world.

What the heck was this?

Why would this guy who would usually leave them alone appear here?

Was he here to employ something? Or was he...

"It hadn't ended, had it?" asked Inaba, forcing a calm face.

What? Why? What should she do?

Although doubts rushed into her intermittently, perplexing her, she could not be distracted.

"There isn't a sign it should end."

His voice was so lazy it sounded repugnant.

As if her territory was invaded, she was very vigilant.

Nevertheless, «Heartseed» didn't look like he would attack her suddenly. As such, Inaba could feel relieved, yet she shouldn't lower her guard.

"Then what is it? Scram, you jackass."

"Aye, aye. Haven't you found it out yet? Or should I say you have forgotten it? Inaba, I said I will make things more interesting if there is a need to do so."

"Isn't the premise is that we lock ourselves in our homes?"

"Eh? Is that what I said? Forget it. It doesn't mind. Come to think of it. Don't you count as half a shut-in now?"

"Hmph! I haven't been shutting myself out to that degree. Besides, I have gone to school every day," said Inaba, forcing her words out, feeling appalled at the same time. She realised again that «Heartseed» truly observed her and other club members.

"But Inaba, you really are interesting. Observing you is worthwhile."

"So what? Spit it out. You didn't come for chatting, did you?"

"Chatting? Ahah. Perhaps it's close to that, but my main intention is to waver you."

"To wave me?"

Inaba couldn't grasp the situation.

"Ahah. Didn't I say I would interfere at times? This is because I was found to be too lazy. Strange. Didn't I say this before? Then let me tell you."

"Stop fooling around, you bastard! Besides, you said you were found to be too lazy. Does this mean you have a boss?"

"Ah? Who knows?"

His impotent voice was infuriating as always.

"But Inaba, you look distressed."

Although Inaba hesitated a bit of whether to concede to this, she then found it pointless to go against it.

"Thanks to you."

What did «Heartseed» want to get from her? She wanted try him out, but there were no feelings expressed on his face other than nothingness.

"This is all because of the preposterous unleashing of desire thing you induced!"

"Don't put it like that. This isn't what I mean. How should I put it? Why do you treasure the space you share with your comrades so much? If you really think it's bothersome, why not just destroy it?"

Her breathing stopped in the instant.

Had he understood all of these things already?

Although he gave a good and sweet reason for her to 'destroy it', she wouldn't easily fall for it. She couldn't fall for it.

"In my heart at present, that space is the most important. How will I destroy it?"

She couldn't believe the first person she said this to was «Heartseed».

"Ahah. What a staunch determination. What? According to you, if you destroy that, the next thing you would destroy would be the whole world. I was expecting that development actually."

"I won't do such things that occur only in mystery mangas. What is wrong with your imagination?"

Where was this guy from? What was he?

"Ahah. Finally, let me waver you. Is that the most important thing to you?"

"What?"

"Isn't there something else of the same importance to you, Inaba?"

"There isn't."

How would there be something more important than that space?

This was impossible.

"Don't say that. There is. You're just doing your best to deceive yourself in believing you haven't noticed it. You think that if you were to express this, you would destroy that place."

"Shut up!" Inaba cried, interrupting «Heartseed»'s words. She was too tired to be aware to speak softly.

"Ahah. Seems like you know what I'm talking about. Once you know it, you can't turn back. You can't escape from it too, most likely."

Shut up. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up. Shut the hell up!

That space was the only place she hoped she could safeguard.

The feeling that rushed into her afterwards was only induced when she was in a confused state.

Right. This was what happened.

There shouldn't be more things she should be aware of.

If this happened, she couldn't take it on eventually.

"Aye. The impact of my line was beyond my expectation. Ahah. Perhaps the climax is near. I look forward to what it will happen."

«Heartseed» looked at Inaba with eyes, eyes muddy yet seemed as if they could see through everything.

Inaba couldn't make a sound.

She pressed on her chest, her heart as well as her mind tangled in a mess.

During this time, «Heartseed» just stood there silently.

After a while, «Heartseed» recommenced, "Ahah. Since I have done what I should, it's time I head back."

So what did he want to achieve? If he had to leave, then why not leave earlier? It was beyond her apprehension. How strange.

"What do you want to do with this denatured human being?" asked Inaba, forcing a voice, even though she knew he wouldn't answer her.

Yet «Heartseed» did the otherwise and answered her question, "I have a question to ask you: is the state that humans are in now most ideal? Anyway, you don't really need to think about it."

He really made her infuriated somehow.

"Hey. Can I punch you?"

"I only need to let this person let his consciousness return to his body before I get punched."

What a disgusting conversation.

If he had to leave, she hoped he could do it as soon as possible.

He said he would only observe at a side, but instead he came here to waver her.

Nevertheless, there was one more problem before this.

"Do you plan to find others?"

Hearing this, «Heartseed» lifted the corner of his lips to say "how interesting". What?

"Don't worry. This is a special visit just for you, Inaba. Or should I say, do you really think I would run these troublesome errands several times?"

"How could this...So why did you come to my house? You can find opportunities at school too," complained Inaba.

Stuffing her head with other stuff, she found herself feeling better. She could feel the strong Inaba Himeko in herself again.

"Aye. Aye. It isn't this easy to explain. Or should I say, isn't this very interesting too?"

"How is it interesting? Besides, why do you appear every time in Gotou's body? If you could jump into anyone's body, you can find other club members or even my family members, can't you?"

Being asked by Inaba, «Heartseed» showed a sign of puzzlement, slightly stiffened.

"This is because there are few and far between people that wouldn't mind having a gap in their memory."

She could understand why now.

"Ahah. Why did I say so much stuff after I've said I had to leave? It's also some useless stuff too. Ahah. I can't understand myself. So I'm leaving now. Please don't be too much of a shut-in; otherwise, I might employ some other measures."

Having left the worst line ever, the «Heartseed», who has the appearance of Gotou, left the room. Just to ensure everything goes well, Inaba saw him off all the way until he had left her house.

Through the windows of her room, Inaba saw him off.

Chapter 7 - Hiking Turned Out to Be a Battlefield

Thanks to that guy, I have more things to be aware of now.

If I could, I would wipe them away from my memory.

Nevertheless, it had been engraved in my heart so deep that I couldn't just neglect it.

Even if I didn't want it to happen, even if I wanted to wipe it away, it would cause pain on my chest regardless.

I was unprivileged to say this.

People like me shouldn't have this feeling.

It was great to have a place for accommodation.

This was why I didn't want to give it up.

If I were to express this feeling...no, I had to prevent this from happening.

This was because I wouldn't be able to go back there once this happened.

The bonds that we held would collapse.

This was why I had to do everything to cover it up.

Could I bear it? Could I withstand it? Could I skimp them? Could I protect it?

In short, I didn't want to destroy it.



Since Kiriyaama had started coming to school, these three days flew very peacefully to the club members—at least this was what Taichi believed.

Although sometimes their desires were unleashed, problems that were induced were insignificant ones that wouldn't leave scars behind.

Perhaps it was because of Taichi and the others had left the tensed situation they were trapped in that they could take things with the sense of ease, bringing a dramatically conducive effect.

The only problem was that Inaba still kept her distance from them.

Days flew, Friday arrived. It was on the day of outdoor learning.

The weather was bright, the sky calm.

Upon arriving at school, Taichi found out that a lot of students of the first grade had gathered in the sports field. They were wearing casual wear, which made it awkward, as they were seemingly at school.

The air was filled with anticipation and anxiety. There were only some girls complaining they had to walk, which restricted them from dressing themselves up with the degree of beauty they desired.

Upon finding his group, Taichi walked forward to them.

Nagase Iori was wearing a striped T-shirt along with a jacket with a soft khaki hood and pants. It was because of her natural outfit instead of pretending to be mature that made her look like an adult, splendid and charming.

Kiriyaama Yui was wearing a checkered loose shirt and one-piece dress along with snuggly denim jeans. Her outfit not only put the convenience of her activity of her account but also the unique elegance of girls.

Inaba Himeko, on the other hand, wore clothes based on the black colour, having a sweater that clearly exposed the curvature of her body and pants that accentuated her slim and long legs. Although it was a simple outfit, it looked very trendy on Inaba, who had the potentials of a model. She looked like she would be in a commercial in a magazine.

Aoki Yoshifumi was wearing a hooded jacket.

The aforementioned people were the members of the Yamaboshi School.

"Good morning!" greeted Taichi, followed by everyone's smiling replies.

Well, Inaba looked at him with a rigid face.

They were experiencing a serious situation. Though it was eccentric, they could at least go on at ease like this.

This was perhaps owing to the kind of people these members were.

Everyone still had the discomfort of anything that might happen.

Someone in them might go nuts or hurt others, threatening them.

Looking at what they are in, they had to keep a distance from each other; however, they could be together because they wanted to be together.

They could overcome this trial if they worked together with the same will.

Still, Inaba didn't pay any heed to the encouragement of other members. Her attitude seemed to have become even more adamant in these two days.

Taichi started to feel a bit restless.

Although he told her that they would help her no matter what problem struck them, there wasn't even a problem to start with, so they couldn't take any further actions.

He hoped Inaba was being like this solely because she hadn't yet adjusted her feelings.



When everyone had arrived, they rode on the bus they booked and went to the hill they planned to go to.

Arriving at the foot of the hill, everyone had a challenge of going up the mountain within an hour. Be that as it may, their route was almost flat, and everyone could walk through easily and briskly.

If one had to ask what problems occurred along their way, it must be Nagase's desire being unleashed while she went up the hill. Perhaps her desire of wanting to act like a spoilt child was unleashed, and thus she began complaining, "Ah. I don't want to walk any more. I hate this. Carry me, Taichi," and caught a tight grip on Taichi.

Also, the class teacher of class 1C, Gotou Ryuuzen, who shouldn't even experience the unleashing of desires, said, "Gosh! How tiring it is to hike in a hangover. Help me, Inaba." His words quickly made Inaba reproach him, "You should know that we're having an outdoor learning activity! Walk properly, you pig-headed teacher!" However you put it, they seemed to have their roles reversed.

When they had arrived to the destination of their route, which was the middle of the hill where the facilities were situated, they started, in their groups, to cook curry—this was what they had to do, though some problems occurred.

Having heard of the staff's explanation of the facilities, Fujishima Maiko explained what she heard to Taichi and her group mates.

"They say there will be half of the groups which can use the new furnaces and the new tables, whereas the other half needs to use the old ones."

If they had booked ahead, they could also borrow other props aside from what the staff had prepared for them. But because the props had aged a lot and become cranky, they couldn't repair all of them in time. Some of them were new ones, glittering, while others looked like old ones that would fall apart anytime.

Although the half of the facilities was enough for the class usually, but because of the extra amount of people here today, the demands couldn't be met.

As such, the classes played rock-paper-scissors game on a class basis and let the winning classes to use the new ones, and losing classes the old ones.

"Taichi. Do your best!"

"Taichi Yaegashi. If you lose, we'll have to play a punishing game!"

"Fujishima. So we have to play a punish games if he loses? Okay, you have to win, Yaegashi!"

Being encouraged by Nagase, Fujishima, and Watase (some of them are threatening him), Taichi, on behalf of his group, challenged other groups to a rock-paper-scissors game.

"I said I was weak at this game..."

"Don't worry, Taichi. Your misfortune is used up!" said Nagase with a smile, a smile that believed deeply that Taichi would win, so bright Taichi couldn't look at it directly.

When their group decided who would represent them, Taichi was chosen since he lost three times in a row (which was believed to be his refraining from using his luck to win).

"Hey. Taichi, you have to win."

"Then why don't you...Eh, Inaba?"

"I'm only talking to you. Why do you have to be so surprised?"

"N-No. Nothing."

Inaba hadn't struck a conversation with Taichi by herself for a long time. Was it because of the place they're in? The outdoor learning activity surely had some positive impacts to them.

"But your words were filled with feelings," murmured Taichi.

Inaba then had an unsatisfied look.

"Have you kept a close eye on that?"

Inaba pointed at the old table.

Perhaps it wasn't used recently that dried leaves accumulated on top of it.

"Are we going to use unhygienic facilities? We're already cooking outdoors, you know!" Inaba roared lowly, balling her hands in agitation.

Inaba seemed to have bit of mysophobia.

At the end, Taichi lost the game.

Since they have to use the old and ragged furnace and the table, they had to first clean it before use.

Taichi was the first one to begin the cleaning duty, as he knew it was his fault.

He put all the trash into one bag and threw it into the trash field, happening to meet Inaba there too, who clicked her tongue and threw the trash violently, seemingly unsatisfied.

"Um...sorry," Taichi apologised.

Inaba clicked her tongue again.

"Forget it. But why you are so weak at playing rock-paper-scissors? Didn't you lose each time when you played with Iori and Watase? How unlucky can you be?"

Taichi wanted to ask this question too.

"Speaking of which, the results of the divine this morning told me my luck is the worst. Perhaps this has something to do with it. Oh? Is this a cliff? How dangerous."

There was a steep slope beside the trash field.

"Anyone are bound to die if they fall down here. Don't do that, you unlucky guy."

"Whom are you speaking to? Nobody would fall down there in these places if they didn't want to."

"Is that so? Then why are you looking at me with such a malicious smile?"

"Eh. How do I put it. I feel that I haven't chatted with you for ages."

"What? I carelessly...wuaghh!"

Inaba's blushed, her expression twisted in hate.

"Hey. You don't have to reject us so much."

"Stop talking!"

With that said, Inaba left immediately.

The groups had started cooking.

Under Fujishima's commands, Taichi's group worked for different things.

Taichi, Nagase, and Inaba were responsible for handling the food. Fujishima made this arrangement of plans due to her obligation to safeguard the love and peace in the class.

Taichi washed the vegetables and cut them.

Nagase deliberately raised different topics, yet Inaba was reluctant to answer her, so their conversation didn't last long.

Ever since Taichi had said that extra line, Inaba's mood had been bad. Perhaps it was some kind of failure of her side?

Nagase endeavoured to alleviate tense atmosphere.

As Taichi felt it was also part of his fault, he looked for topics too.

"Nagase, you're so skillful," Taichi said a word of praise upon seeing Nagase handling the food so deftly.

"Pretty much. This is because I've done cooking a lot at home."

Nagase's actions were extremely fluent.

"Hey. Inaba, you're a bit crude."

Inaba slashed the vegetable knife swiftly with a large sound.

Rats. He had been too blunt.

"Taichi..."

Nagase looked at Taichi with her eyes white.

Inaba's body shivered. And at the next instant, her long thin eyes widened.

Was her desire unleashed?

If it was, then it would be bad since she was holding the vegetable knife.

He had to come up front to cease her if anything were to happen, Taichi reminded himself, becoming vigilant.

"Taichi, don't look down on me! I'm incredible when I get serious! Do you want to see it?"

Inaba closed in to Taichi.

Looking from her abruptness and her anger, Taichi could safely assume her desire had been unleashed. Nevertheless, what was wrong with her condition? Did saying her crude really make her this mad?

"Tori, you too. Don't get all full of yourself upon having Taichi praising you!"

Strange enough, she switched her attention to Nagase.

“W-What?”

“You don’t have to play dumb! Let’s deal with it using this gherkin for the salad! Let’s see who will cut it faster! I’ll not lose! Taichi, if I win, then you have to admit you’re wrong! Okay, let’s start!”

Neglecting them completely, Inaba started to cut the gherkins.

At the same time, Fujishima, responsible for cooking the rice, came to have a check.

“Aye. Aren’t you guys getting well with each other? It seems it was a great decision to assign you guys to the same group.”

How was it great? Taichi retorted in his heart.

Having cut around a third of the gherkins, Inaba stopped cutting abruptly.

Taichi and Nagase decided to look at her from the side, as she was holding a knife and cutting gherkins, but it seemed that her desires had stopped being unleashed.

“Let me chill myself out for a bit,” said Inaba, flustered.

“Please excuse yourself” said Taichi and Nagase in a unison.

After that, Taichi and Nagase worked together for a while.

Becoming worried about Inaba for not returning after a while, Taichi decided to look for her.

He went through the various groups who were busily making their food.

"Peel the skin off of the carrot!"

"Carrots taste good too with skin—no, they taste better with skin!"

"Yo. The fire's too huge."

"Hey. It's burnt!"

Despite there were many complaining their jobs were tiring and troublesome, everyone seemed to be enjoying their work after they had started.

"Where had Inaba gone? Oh."

He saw Kiriya and Aoki in front of him.

They looked happy and joyful with their classmates.

At this moment, Aoki waved his hand to call for Kiriya.

With a eager face, Kiriya walked slowly to Aoki.

Aoki posed a stance of saying some private words to her, and in response, Kiriya threw her hair behind her ears and stuck her ears towards Aoki.

Her actions were so natural it didn't have a sign of doubt.

Aoki lowered his body as if he was to whisper to Kiriya in an extremely close distance.

Kiriya didn't feel a bit of disgust, and having listened to what Aoki had said, she looked at Aoki, who looked back at her, and they burst in laughter.

If one were to witness this scene, they would never imagine that Kiriya had a fear for boys.

One could only see the mutual, spiritual connection between Kiriya and Aoki.

Thinking that it wasn't too good to be bothering them, Taichi didn't come up to them to ask them the whereabouts of Inaba.

Even when he had gone through everywhere, Taichi still couldn't find the traces of Inaba. As such, Taichi desperately returned to his pose, only to see Inaba had already returned. Oh, how he hoped they could notify him earlier.

"Sorry. My phone couldn't receive any signal," Nagase apologised.

Inaba didn't say anything but looked at Taichi with 'it's all your fault' written on her face.

"Yaegashi. How can you slack off? So the burnt part of the rice will be yours to take. Oh, and I don't mean the guoba^[9]. The guoba will be evenly shared."

Taichi was scolded by Fujishima and even had to bear the responsibility of the failure of their group.

Compared to other groups about to complete, Taichi's group hadn't even started.

"That's about it, isn't it? Fujishima," said Watase lackadaisically due to his hunger.

"Not yet. Wait a little longer."

Although he wasn't sure why, he could see Fujishima had a peculiar persistence in making curry. She put in curry spices she specially made and even wanted to control the time of cooking to a precise level. She was overdoing what should be taken as a mere class activity.

"Do it quicker, Fujishima."

Nagase was also getting hungry and tired.

"Wait a little longer. Just a little longer. Now we have to add the final spices..."

With that being said, Fujishima, however, didn't do anything but looked at her watch.

Having to be patient while your hunger was stimulated by the scent of cooking food was like being tortured.

Though said nothing, Inaba obviously looked extremely impatient too.

"Okay! We can start now!" Fujishima declared at last the permission for them to start.

Their stomachs becoming completely empty and already reaching their limits of hunger, Taichi and this group mates immediately poured in curry onto their plates as if they had a mutual goal.

"Let's eat!"

Everyone devoured the rice soaked in the curry.

"It's delicious!" everyone cried.

"The best spice is an empty stomach...no, let me correct that. It's love!"

Leave aside the joke Fujishima had made, the curry was so delicious it was touching.



They then, around the table, ate curry together under the azure sky. Inaba Himeko listened silently to Taichi, Iori, Fujishima, and Watase's joyous chatting. If someone were to throw the ball to Inaba, she would make a curt reply and continue to munch her curry slowly and delicately.

Inaba rose up and left, for those having finished their meal had to carry their plates to the washing table.

The curry that everyone made together was unexpectedly great—no, it was awesome.

"The curry is delicious. Inaban," said Iori, who had already washed her plates, preparing to return to her seat.

"Yeah," replied Inaba naturally.

Although they had a lot of chances of meeting each other, which could lead them to dangerous situations, Inaba still bore it grudgingly and stood up afresh.

Glad, Iori's tensed face relieved.

She had a smile that would cause those around her to be embraced in happiness.

Inaba felt, from deep down in her heart, that it would be great to reside in that space ample with this smile.

Inaba placed her plate onto the washing table.

"Hey. Inaba! Are you bleeding?" asked Taichi, who had come up to her suddenly.

"Eh?"

Inaba spread her hands in shock, but didn't know where he was talking about.

"Look. It's here!"

Taichi caught her hands and bent it to another angle to let her see it.

"Ah..."

There was blood bleeding from a crack in her left index finger. When did this crack come out? Inaba had no idea.

"It isn't the time to say 'ah'!"

Taichi switched on the tap, took Inaba's hand, and washed it forcibly.

"Hey. I can do it myself, you idiot!"

Inaba promptly withdrew her hand.

"Okay. You must be careful not to let any bacteria get inside."

Watase called for Taichi at the same moment, so Taichi left Inaba through her side.

What a busybody. How laughable.

Inaba stared at her left index finger. The wound looked as if it was here a long time ago, as there was no blood coming out of it now.

The water that crashed on her finger should be icy-cold, yet her finger felt strangely hot—to a point that, perhaps, the water droplets on her finger would evaporate.

Her chest grieved.

[—]

Inaba lightly kissed her index finger.

Her finger as well as her lips felt the scorching heat, a temperature that was higher than her own.

Her whole body began to heat up.

Her chest felt so painful she was about to be driven nuts.

Finally, Inaba lightly reminisced the feeling in her; and as regret came into her, she slowly removed her finger from her lips.

“Inaban, have you...”

Her heart beat rapidly; her blood flowed in a way as if it was flowing backwards.

Shivering, Inaba faced to where the voice had come from.

Iori was standing there, glaring at her.

Her heartbeat sounds amplified; it became more and more difficult to breathe.

What did Iori witness?

What had she seen in me?

When did this start?

These pointless questions flew through her mind.

She knew it was pointless—pointless like an idiot.

Although she was being like this, she was, at the least, a woman.

The sense of a woman told her...

Iori recommenced, "Inaban, have you fallen in love with..."

It was found out.

After all, there were many implications that would lead Iori to think that way.

For example, the first events of this phenomenon were obvious implications.

Inaba covered the reason she pushed Taichi down by saying it was due to her desire for sex, that she would do the same thing regardless it was Taichi or not.

Nevertheless, to be honest, she wouldn't really do the same thing to any person

Iori was about to say the last words of her line.

One she said that, the space Inaba tried to sustain would collapse due to imbalance.

It had, until now, been at the state nearly ideal.

Why?

She hated it. She wanted her to stop. She didn't want to listen.

She didn't want to be the culprit for destroying it. She wanted to continue protecting it.

Even when she reckoned she was unprivileged to do this, this was her only mental pillar, and thus she cherished it for a long time.

It was an important place to her.

She didn't want to lose it.

She didn't want everything to end.

She hoped it wouldn't.

She had no idea what would happen when it were to end.

So...so...so...

Inaba ran away immediately.

Deep down in the hills, the long and thin trees stood everywhere. As Inaba cleared a way through the bushes, a way that wasn't the road she should be walking, she went to a place with a pile of dried leaves. The road was plain, and it was not hard to run on this ground.

Inaba neglected the calling sounds for her behind.

All she did was running. She ran for her life as if she had to pulverize the plants below her.

Should there be an obstacle in front of her, she would use the least steps to evade it and find the farthest place from she had been.

She could sense something was catching her.

Yet Inaba would never turn around. All she had to focus was the front.

She was so careless a person she wanted to puke at herself.

Why did she do such a rash thing?

Was it because of the unleashing of desires?

She felt she could hear the sound, but another feeling told her she didn't.

The desire itself was stupid. Someone thinking like that meant his or her mind went wrong.

Had she been too careless? Or were her gut feelings weaker than what she had thought?

If only she had be more aware...

This feeling was all because of all these events that carried her away.

Her priority had already been set.

Her breathing was messed up.

Her throat was dry.

She wanted to vomit.

The ground she stepped on became even messier.

There were several times Inaba had almost tripped over.

Even so, she ran for her life regardless.

Why?

Was it just coincidence that she could hide it away in the days before?

Was hiding even possible under the effects of the unleashing of desire?

Would «Heartseed» snatch her place of accommodation away?

What was the most important thing she wanted to safeguard?

She was lucky to have such amiable friends despite her disgusting personality.

If only it could stay a bit longer...would there be a second opportunity that would pop up in her life?

There wouldn't be one any more. She couldn't fathom there would be.

People like her should be better off locked inside a sombre room.

She had always pursued things that she was unfit to have.

She had also understood that on one day, her strong, bold facade would rot, yet she felt she could still be able to keep it up to veil her ugly side.

She had always had a small dream—that if she were a strong, reliable person, she could stay with everyone.

Nevertheless, she had to meet her fate.

She had done so much to keep everything in its place, yet a big hole was created out of her expectation. Water flowed affluently from the hole, beyond her control.

The most important thing was to be with everyone.

Though a small wish, it could be already said as an unreasonable request for her.

Why did she still have to pursue things beyond this?

How ignorant she was.

Wasn't it certain that greed would bring destruction?

If only she could have kept her distance during the unleashing of desires...if only she could have prevented herself from making mistakes, be unnoticed, and hide her past, then...

Her feelings grew stronger as she thought more about it. There would be a way, she hoped, that she could transcend what she was going through at the moment.

Be it as it may, why did she still...just why did she still...why...

What should she do if there were not a way to repair things back to normal?

Trying to escape the fear burdening her, Inaba ran with all her might.

She wished she could run to a place where there was no one else.



Escape. Escape. Escape.

Inaba felt that her failure could be erased if she were to run to a place with no ends.

Yet this was impossible.

She had to face the reality.

Lactic acid accumulated in her legs, and her lungs ached. Inaba stopped, at last, her knees felling onto the ground.

There was a small space, though narrow, between the tall trees.

Wasn't this a place where there was no one else?

When Inaba tried to hallucinate, she was immediately disillusioned afterwards.

"Inaban...Inaba...Inaban!"

Although the voice was mixed with irregular breathing sounds, she could make it out it was calling for her.

Having a poor physical state, Inaba could never shake Iori off.

She couldn't turn back yet.

Staring at the ground, Inaba put her concentration on regulating her breathing patterns.

Her mind was in a mess.

What should she do? What would happen? What would Iori do? Could she hide her past? Had Iori discovered it yet? What was the measure she should adopt? What was the possibility it could succeed? Was there even any possibility?

Various thoughts crossed against each other, unable to form a clear shape. Her mind had gone completely blank.

Sweat slid over her affluently, reaping away the heat in her when they evaporate.

Heat and coldness was mixed in her body.

Whether it was her body or her brain, feelings swung everywhere, impossible to clarify in such a short time.^[10]

Regardless of her struggle, time flew ruthlessly, the swing in her mood slowly easing.

Iori had also calmed down.

"Hey. Why, Inaban, why..."

Iori's agitated and trembling voice was the only sound drifting through them.

"Hey. Inaban. Have you...fallen in love...with Taichi too?"

No. Don't ask. She didn't want to listen.

She wanted to stuff her ears, but her body was stiff, and she couldn't force her body to move.

There was no turning back.

While Inaba was unable to reply, the sound of leaves crumpling approached her.

A hand lay on her shoulder, and forced her to turn her head back.

Iori's face entered her vague vision.

Iori, originally crying, became shocked upon seeing Inaba's face.

How was she looking like? Inaba didn't even want to imagine.

"Why?" Iori murmured again and backed a few steps, sitting flatly on the ground.

"Is it because you always wanted Taichi and I to be together? Isn't that what you always said to me? Why?"

Iori touched her forehead, vexed of what expression to show.

"Of course I can sense that you also love Taichi...but is that love different from the love between friends?"

Her vision was distorted; she had almost let off a sobbing sound.

"Then why did you deliberately want Taichi to be with me? Do you plan to offer him to me?"

As Iori weaved her words, Inaba only waved her head in denial.

Inaba hadn't thought of any offering Iori had been talking about. She only wanted to let those two be together. This was what she had decided from the very start.

"If you plan to offer him to me, then why are you still presenting such pain?"

Did she look like she was in immense pain? Most likely.

It was painful. It was really painful.

At this moment, Iori's voice suddenly broke off.

Then, she stood up abruptly.

"What the hell! Explain it now and clearly, Inaba Himeko!"

Iori suddenly changed to an angry mode. Flames of fury was burning in her eyes.

Whatever the case, this was too sudden. Oh, had her desires been unleashed?

Nevertheless, thinking of this was useless. Whatever might have occurred, the person standing before her was still Nagase Iori.

"What the hell! What the hell! What the fucking hell!"

Ahah. The world she wanted to protect was gradually torn apart.

"If you don't make yourself clear right now, I won't be your friend anymore!"

Stop it. Don't ever do this.

She couldn't stand it any more.

"That's...That's because if I don't do this, the five of us couldn't stay together any more..."

It was when Inaba spoke that she found out she was crying very dismally.

Tears slid over her cheeks.

"Why couldn't we be together?"

Demanded for an answer, Inaba, sobbing, grudgingly squeezed some words, "that's because if boys and girls develop such strange relationships like love...conflicts will arise...and even result in the destruction of friendships!"

Inaba wasn't certain of what would really happen. She hadn't fallen in love with someone, and she never had such a deep friendship with someone else. She didn't believe anyone else in this world before.

This was because she had been alone until this time.

"Aoki loves Yui, and Yui seems to have a similar inclination too. Iori, you want a person to support you; Taichi is here for this job. So wouldn't everything be great if you could be with Taichi?"

If this happened, then the five could be together, and she could protect this important place.

Inaba was very fond of being with the other four. She was very fond of the place they created.

"What bullshit are you talking about? Are you an idiot! How would everything be great? I couldn't believe that you, Inaba Himeko, could think of something this stupid!"

Iori shouted in agitation, her feelings unveiled, exploding some emotions within Inaba.

Her feelings that were hid until now was about to fill her and come out.

Inaba didn't want to stop them from coming out any more.

"I had been alone! I had been alone for so long! But since I entered high school, I met people I could call friends, so, whatever the case, I didn't want to lose them! Also, I didn't have a single idea of what to do!"

She had felt lonely for a long time.

But then, she was not alone any more.

Once she knew how it felt when loneliness left her, she became afraid she would become lonely again.

Instantly becoming stiff, Iori looked at Inaba, her eyes blinking repeatedly.

Then, after easing her emotions for a while, she shouted at Inaba, her eyes sharp and wide, "I don't care about that! Say you're lonely when you are! If you're so scared and worried you would lose everything, say it out! Not everyone in this world are as sharp as you! If you hope slow-witted people know how you feel, say it out! Even if you may feel embarrassed and perturbed, you still have to say it out loud!"

But how could she say it?

She couldn't let others know her weak points.

She had to be the strong, capable Inaba Himeko; otherwise, others wouldn't take her as a necessary being.

She also couldn't mold the place to accommodate herself.

"Why did you do such stupid things without leaving a word?"

"Th-Then, tell me what I should do!"

"Then do nothing, will you!" cried Iori, her hair swinging into a mess.

"How could I...How could I do that! People like me who are so useless, so hated, so rubbish..."

People like me...

"Stop saying 'people like me'! Don't say that to yourself!"

"What can I do then? I'm not the nice guys you people are!"

"If not, then what should I, who loves Inaba Himeko the most, do!"

Being said by Iori, Inaba stopped her breathing subconsciously in a sudden; she might have even forgotten to breathe.^[11]

She could only hear Iori's agitated, panting voice.

"I love you the most, Inaban! I truly love you! If you don't understand, I'll say this until you understand! It's not only me but also everyone who loves you!"

Would they be willing to say they love her, even finding out what person she really was?

How would...That's only...

"The person you love was the faked Inaba Himeko who is strong and capable. She's different from me, who's weak and ugly."

"I love Inaba, no matter how dismal she is! No, No, Inaban! Inaba Himeko is a even better person than Inaban...no, this isn't close too. This isn't close."

Iori swung her head strongly. In this conversation, Inaba had an illusory feeling that Iori's exploding feelings were landing on her.

"Humans cannot be divided into good or bad! Humans cannot be separated with such a simple system, Inaban. How am I different from you? Aren't we the same, Inaban? We're the same, Inaban! Trust me! If I...If I look like a good person to you, then you should trust me, a good person you think I am!"

Iori repeated herself to emphasis that Inaba was the same as her.

It was what she reckoned deep in her heart.

It wasn't some kind of polite words to make her feel better, as she was in the state of her desires being unleashed.

It was about time to...

They were nearly there...

"It doesn't matter, Inaban! Even if you don't work so hard, I'll still be your friend! No, to 'be your friend' sounds too awkward. I should say, I will be your friend forever! Please, let me be your friend for the days to come!"

It wouldn't hurt if she tried, now would it?

"Ahah. I, actually, I...I have long hoped for someone to say this to me..."

Tears naturally flowed out of her along with her words.

It didn't matter if she was the strong Inaba Himeko or not. It didn't matter if she was the dependable Inaba Himeko or not. Even if she was the poor, weak Inaba Himeko, it was fine.

There would still be people who would love her in this state.

It wouldn't matter if she believed in others and showed them what she really was, would it?

She could continue to get along with them with her authentic self, couldn't she?

It was great to be able to think of this at last.

"Thanks."

The feeling of gratitude flowed out from the depths of her heart.

She might have hoped strongly for a long time for someone to be willing to say he or she loves her with such strong emotions.

She had nothing more to long for now.

It was enough for someone to be willing to say this to her.

"Thanks, Iori, for saying this to me, despite my worthlessness. But everything's too late now. Look what we've ended up. There's no way to change things back. My presence would only militate against your relationship with Taichi. Besides, I don't want to destroy the inter-relationships of the club members, so I...can't return to the clubroom..."

Tears had stopped already without her knowing.

"Why?" asked Iori.

Her eyes penetrated Inaba.

Had the unleashing of desires not ended yet?

Inaba's body shivered, and she recommenced, "It's because the atmosphere has gone to such embarrassment we can't treat each other the way we had before."

"Why did this happen?"

It was a cold and vigorous voice.

Iori continued, "No, I meant something before that. When you said that everything would be great when Aoki and Yui became a pair and Taichi and I became a pair. But, won't it be great too if you become a pair with Taichi? Why don't you do that?"

"No. This is because I thought it was great to do so...you're more fit with Taichi. You guys look like a pair permitted by God. Besides, I don't have much feeling for Taichi. Ah, right, saying this won't help now..."

"Why do you still have to lie to yourself when we've got so far?" Iori cried with a voice as if blood will be pulled out from her throat.

"What lie...I didn't..."

"Although I think this way is stupid, do you still want to do your best to protect the relationships among us five? Don't you think this is more important than anything else?"

Right. Right, she was.

"But even if you knew this relationship might collapse, you still love Taichi—to a stage you couldn't stand it, isn't it? Then you wouldn't have got yourself to a situation like this!" Iori cried, causing grief to stir in Inaba's chest.

This feeling she had. This thought she possess. This pain that was about to wreck open her chest...

"When you have two things you want, and when you'll lose one thing when you chose the other, what will you chose, Inaba Himeko?"

Only succumbing to Iori's forceful voice, Inaba answered in reflex, "I'll certainly choose the one that is truly important."

"No! Inaba Himeko, you should want to have both of them!"

Due to her excessive shouting, Iori's voice became husky. Although her throat seemed to be in much pain, Iori still shouted. It was all for Inaba Himeko.

"If it's you, you can do it! If it's you, you can snatch away the boy your friend loves, but, at the same time, relieving the embarrassing atmosphere and let everything wrap up nicely! Once you decided on what to do, you'll do it! Whatever tragedies you're in, you wouldn't give up so easily; you would never give in! This is Inaba Himeko. This is the true Inaba Himeko! Arrogant, evil yet with a polite facade, controlling others for her own gain, willing to do anything to make what she said comes true...this is the true Inaba Himeko!"

What person was Inaba Himeko?

What person was Inaba Himeko hoping to become?

"Besides, even if you don't do this..."

Iori stopped for a while, inhaled deeply, and pushed the air out with her whole body as if saying this was the last, "The friendship between Nagase Iori and Inaba Himeko wouldn't be destroyed from fighting over for the man they love!"

Iori then made a deep breathe, and added with a calm face, "I believe our friendship isn't so fragile. So, Inaban, you don't have to be so wary of that. Come back to the clubroom! It doesn't matter."

Tears she should have ceased almost came out again, but Inaba endeavoured to stop them from coming out.

She bit her lips, sucked her snivel, faced upwards, and wiped the tears accumulated in the corner of her eyes.

She was so weak she was helpless. She had always been loud and haughty to hide this.

She had been hiding it again and again, yet she couldn't make it to the end.

She had always believed she was a useless person.

She lacked confidence in herself.

She hated herself.

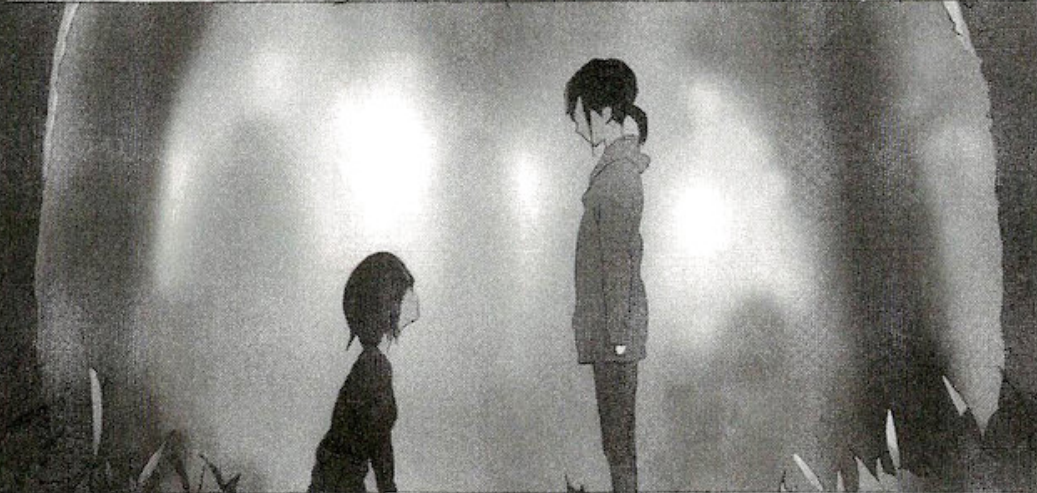
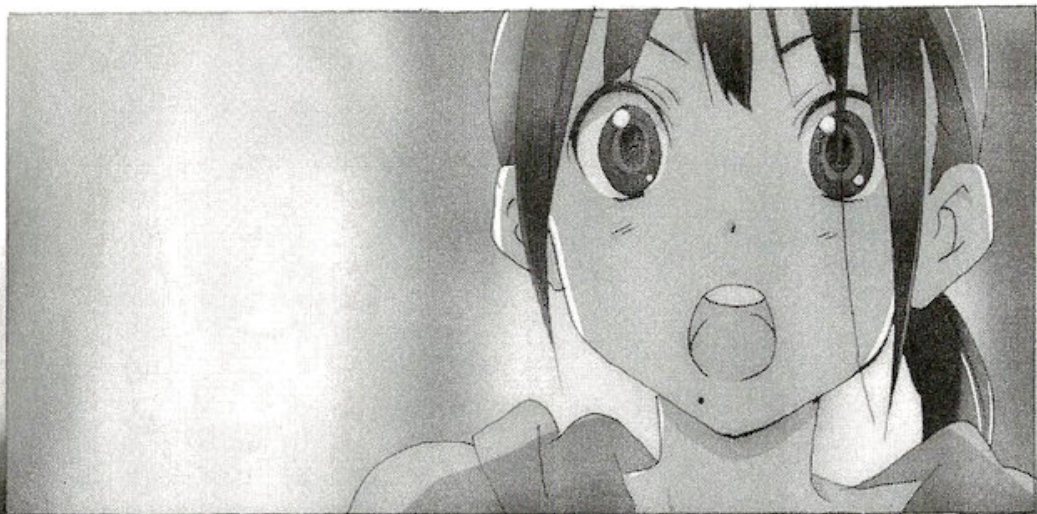
Yet someone was willing to say she likes her despite her personality.

Someone was willing to cheer her up.

It might not be beneficial for Iori to say this, yet she did.

Iori was so strong. Inaba had been too belittling her.

Inaba wanted to be as strong as Iori.



Strong not only in what she appeared but also in her heart.

This was the person she wanted to be.

Therefore, Inaba, moving her unsteady legs, stood up by herself, not asking help from anyone else. She stood on the ground firmly, her back straight, her hands on her hips, and begin speaking for the person who had said she loved her as well as for herself.

"Okay! I understand! I don't care if you will regret! Don't look down at me. If that's what you said, then I'll have to win flawlessly: to do my best and defeat you completely without leaving any aftermath!"

She almost cried while she had been saying this. Her words had been clumsy, yet she still had managed to make it to the end and without leaving her eyes off of Iori. She started at Iori, who was her rival in love, her comrade, and also her best friend.

With her back straight, Iori looked at Inaba and listened to her words. She gently showed a smile like a blooming flower.

The smile was so charismatic that, even as a female, Inaba had almost fallen in love with her.

"First things first, Inaban. I don't plan to admit defeat or offer him to you! Or should I say, do you really think you can win against me?"

Having that said, Iori smiled like an arrogant child.

Inaba smiled along with her. How long had she showed a smile like this?

"There are many ways to win a girl whose only tactic is her cute face," replied Inaba.

"You're being too mean," said Iori, smiling.

"But if I really lose to you, I would do my best to prevent the embarrassment, especially in making less trouble for Taichi."

She could do it. If it was her, she could do it. Let them see it what she was capable of.

So she had to become greedy.

She had to say the things she wanted and think of ways to get it.

"Thanks! I'll do my best too."

It was only now that the nervousness in her was eased since the unleashing of desires had started.

The nervousness she once were in was due to her being scared that she would end up finding herself trouble if she had let her guard down.

"By the way, Iori, you're so radical."

This was certainly surprising, although she wasn't certain when did the unleashing of desires start or when it ended.

Iori looked as if she didn't expect she would say that and fell into contemplation. Then, she said lowly, "Is that... 'me'?"

"Who knows? But from what you've said just now, it looks like the call you, Iori, have made from the depths of your heart."

Iori showed a smile and nodded her assent slowly.

"Ah. Speaking of which, when was my desire unleashed? And when did it stopped?"

Iori had her own agonies too. Although she had a strong side, she was basically moody.

She, Inaba, had to do something for Iori someday, Inaba thought.

Just at this moment...

The Iori in front of her suddenly lost her expression.

Normal people wouldn't have this kind of a face printed on them.

Normally, this face would only appear on Gotou Ryuusen.

"Let me say this first: please don't mistake me..." said «Heartseed», now taking the appearance of Nagase Iori.

"Stop kidding. What are you going to do?"

Inaba hadn't seen this with her own eyes before, but she had heard from Taichi that «Heartseed» had entered Iori's body and jumped into the river, which had caused Iori's life to be at stake.

"Eh. I'm telling the truth. I don't plan to come here, but...how should I put it...I think it's more interesting to tell you now...correction: it's *better*..."

"I don't understand what you're talking about."

The blood vessels in her brain was about to explode in any second.

"There's not much to it, really. I only want to make things more exciting. Strange, doesn't I sound as if I didn't explain anything? Forget it. Makes no difference. Let's go back to where we are. Yaegashi fell down there by himself."

Her mind became completely blank.

"I really didn't do anything. This is what it is. What is that? A self-sacrificing idiot? That's so brave. If I were him, I would have studied carefully of what I would be going through before I do anything, but Yaegashi surely wouldn't...ah."

Inaba dashed off.

She used all her might to get back to the path she had been on.

Was it all right to leave Iori behind? This thought sprang into her mind, though she didn't really care. Although it was unpleasant for her to believe in the words that came from the mouth of that guy, there wasn't any need for him to be hostile or malicious towards them. He only wanted to make things a bit more *interesting*. Besides, He seemed to be in favour of them, so Iori wouldn't just die like that.

Nevertheless, how about Taichi?

He was really an idiot—a real idiot. He was willing to do anything to help someone else. If his desire was unleashed, what would he face?

Upon hearing him say, *fell down there*, Inaba suddenly thought of that place.

There was a cliff beside it.

At the same time, she remembered the words she had said.

Would you really die this time?

Although uncertain of what happened to Taichi, she knew Taichi would do things for inexplicable reasons.

So Inaba used all her might to run.

Her lungs ached, her chest ached, her throat ached, her legs ached. When she fell down, her arm that hit the ground ached.

Although she once asked herself why she was doing her best to run, her legs just couldn't stop.

She had no idea of where she was. Even whether she was on the right path was a mystery. If she had considered efficiency and reliability, she should have stopped for a while for a look around—this was what her calm, steady mind told her.

Be that as it may, her legs just couldn't stop. Inaba let her painful legs advance repeatedly.

Covered with cuts and bruises, she imagined what she looked like to be so tragic a look it was unsightly. She must have looked like an idiot running with coarse movements. If someone were to see her, they would have likely laughed.

How unsightly. How embarrassing. She really wanted to stop immediately and take this easily. She didn't want to be taken as an idiot, being looked down, or make an impression of herself being weak. She hoped others could take her as being strong.

Various feelings rushed into her, but all of them vanished in an instant.

What was good about caring about her appearance? Let those laughing laugh. The only thing she should care was to let this impulse in her drive her forward. She should face her desires honestly! *Face this honestly* was also what she wanted to tell to her friends.

While she walked, the distance between the trees became more messy. She could see light in front and hear sounds of people.

Having arrived, Inaba's legs stopped suddenly.

Her disarrayed breathing was noisy, and her heartbeat sounds were incredibly loud.

What was happening? She didn't even know herself. As if her legs had grown roots, they didn't move an inch.

Was she scared? Yes, she was scared. She was scared that when she had run here with all her might, no one would need her power. She was scared that perhaps she had already been abandoned.

She was also scared that others might look at her right now, and what she looked like to them would change. The impression she had tried to sustain in making might collapse and become looked down upon and stepped on.

She might be taken as useless and unnecessary.

And perhaps Taichi may not need her help even if she wanted to help.

These are yet other excuses.

She was trying to find excuses again, coming up with fallacious reasons to deceive herself.

She had been escaping till now and had not yet showed her authentic self. Even when she was hurt, she would think she was hurt only on the surface, so it wouldn't mind. She had been hiding her past all along.

Nevertheless, this also implied that she would never be able to pursue the thing she truly wanted the most.

This was why she had to face herself honestly now.

She had to have confidence in herself for the person she loved.

So, so, so...

Inaba dashed frontwards.

Accumulated stress, her legs trembled wearily; her knees didn't listen to her any more, but she still advanced.

The brightness was gradually increased, and the sounds she could hear amplified.

Biting her lips, Inaba breathed in deeply with her nose.

Inaba looked around, finding everyone, who, having finished packing their lunch, was playing all sorts of ball games. Some of them spotted her and pointed at her.

Then, she caught a glimpse of Yaegashi lying on the long bench weakly and wearily.

Chapter 8 - To Act Out What Has Been Said

"But, Yaegashi, I think what you did is still a bit too much," said Fujishima Maio, sitting beside Taichi's head on the bench.

"To help a cat who crawled up a tree and couldn't come back down by climbing the tree yourself, and to hold the cat in your arms when it was about to fall...and ended up falling down on the floor, acting as the cushion for the cat—I would only see these things in a virtual world."

"But I couldn't help it."

Even if it was him, he wouldn't do this if his desires weren't unleashed.

"Anyway, it's great to see you without a scratch. That tree was quite high. If someone were to get hurt during an outdoor learning activity, my reputation as the class president will be negatively affected."

Fujishima let out a deep sigh of helplessness.

"I'm sorry for giving you trouble."

"But I now do understand why you would be popular. Although you're an idiot from whatever perspective I look at, I can't help being touched when having to see you do this in real time. This doesn't mean I'm mesmerised by you. Please don't mistake my words. I'm not such a frivolous woman," Fujishima added and let out an icy laugh.

My...Taichi didn't know how to respond to her.

"Forget it. Oh, it's Inaba. Wuaghh!"

Inaba, nowhere to be seen just then, had come back. Taichi also turned his head to look at Inaba, but Fujishima was blocking his view, so he couldn't make up why she had exclaimed.

"Yeah. Although it isn't much of a deal, I think I shouldn't be in the way. My instinct as the priest of love is telling me it's time I leave. Let's meet in a while, Yaegashi."

"Hey, Fujishima. What do you mean?"

Having left a line of great implication, Fujishima left Taichi.

"What the heck?" murmured Taichi.

Inaba looked at Taichi from above.

"Hey, Ina..."

Taichi wanted to call her originally, but then stopped.

Inaba's face was soaked with sweat, her hair tousled; a few strands of hair stuck on her cheeks, her panting face accentuated her ragged appearance, which was stunning. Perhaps owing to her falling down, her black coat was stuck with dried leaves and wood pieces, and there were scratches on her sleeves.

And the most important thing was that shimmering water droplets slid off from Inaba Himeko's eyes.

Taichi had never seen Himeko cried.

Taichi had seen her about to cry, but even when they were about to face Nagase's death, she didn't cry for everyone and faced it courageously.^[12]

Inaba was now sobbing, her eyes red, sucking her snivel.

How much had he let Inaba become worried?

Trying his best to lift himself, Taichi apologised to her, "I'm sorry, Inaba! Please don't cry! I didn't hurt myself...Wuagh!"

Inaba gave Taichi's abdomen an elbow blow, a blow like no other.

"Wuaghh. Wuaghh. Wait! You're overdoing it. That one really hurt me."

He almost wanted to vomit the curry he had eaten, but managed to withstand it.

"Fu...fu...I almost thought I would die. How did you..."

"Stop letting those around you to worry about you, you idiot!"

Having that said, Inaba let off the residual energy she had and plopped down on the floor.

She didn't care whether it would dirty her clothes. She sat on the floor weakly, crying over her shivering and thin shoulders.

How fragile and weak. She looked as if she was about to collapse. Anyone seeing her would surely have a tender affection towards her.

Taichi lightly placed her hand on Inaba's shoulders. He gently touched her so as to prevent it from irritating her.

Then, Inaba wiped her tears and said softly and lowly, "After the outdoor learning activity ends and we get back to school, I have something to tell you. Let's meet at the back yard of the east building."



After the outdoor learning activity had ended, Inaba and the others returned to school by bus.

Owing to her disarrayed look, some came to ask her for what happened, but Inaba skimped them nicely.

After they were dismissed, Inaba caught Iori, telling her what she planned to do. Iori quietly nodded in response, and wished her good luck.

"Can I really do it?" Inaba asked, but Iori quickly replied, "This is the easiness I have as the advantageous one." Oh, how haughty she sounded...anyway, Inaba said thank you to her from the depths of her heart.

Inaba could now be proud that she had befriended Nagase Iori. She also told her proud to Iori, though she cried, "Ina-Inaban, this doesn't sound like you. I-I just feel so embarrassed." And she thus quickly took off. Inaba hoped it wasn't a result of her desires being unleashed.

After these matters were dealt with, time had drifted faster than she had expected. Taichi was so honest that he must be still waiting for her. She felt really sorry towards him.

Walking to the backyard of the east building, Inaba walked in the school with her uniform. It felt a bit miraculous.

Inaba turned over the corner and reached their rendezvous.

Taichi was standing there.

He was standing, with her back sticking towards her.

Inaba slightly decelerated her footsteps.

Although she planned to do so, she ended up walking gingerly and timidly like an idiot. She was about to call for him anyway, so why had it become so difficult for her now?

Their distance shortened.

He hadn't noticed her yet.

Their distance shortened again.

He hadn't noticed her yet.

Crack!

Inaba carelessly snapped a branch. She could feel her heart skipped a beat.

Sensing the sound, Yaegashi Taichi turned his head around.

"Y-Yo, Inaba."

Having greeted her stiffly, Taichi flew towards Inaba.

Don't come.

Come, but don't run.

She was about to approach him, so he hoped Taichi would stand there and wait for her.

These unreasonable requests dashed across Inaba's mind, but Taichi didn't care. He just approached her gradually and stopped.

From her rough approximation, their distance was a bit more than one metre.

What an idiot. She sounded as if she was writing a poem.

"Do you have something to tell me?" asked Taichi.

Please wait for a while. I still have some mental preparation to do.

Inaba stared at Taichi, inhaled, and...she couldn't speak for some reason.

She averted her eyes off of Taichi for a moment.

What the heck? Why?

Why was she scared when she had reached this stage?

Nevertheless, she couldn't advance if she didn't speak. If she kept it like this, her feelings would not be conveyed. It was her who didn't say it out, yet she was infuriated at others for not understanding herself. Her arguments for herself sounded too illogical.

Nevertheless...

If she really were to say it now, the relationship they had now would, because of this, be destroyed. There was no turning back once she said this. She as well as people around her may get hurt.

And the most important thing was she might be denied. If this happened, she wouldn't know if she could stand up again and advance.

This action was risky, and it brought pain with it.

Nevertheless...

She had decided.

She only had to tell him her feelings. Everything would end after that. Even if scared, she had to say it out. She had to confess her feelings without constant escaping, hiding, giving up, and getting afraid.

So what should she say now? Strange. Speaking of which, she hadn't thought of where to begin explaining. How much should she explain? What should she do to let Taichi understand her feeling? Which line should she pick? Which word should she use? What was the reason? What was the excuse? What should she do to convey it successfully? What should she just do?

She began to become messed. She became to feel dizzy, her blood swishing and swashing. She didn't know what was happening in her. Her mind had collapsed. Her theories had lost their meanings. She had to say it out now, but she was at a loss. She had no residual strength to think of what to say, nor did she have the confidence of saying them.

It was enough. She only had to say one thing. She only had to say the most important thing. *Is it only three words? Three words are enough. They are enough to do the job. So let my mouth move...*

"I love you."

Ahah. She said it at last.



Taichi received the heaviest three words in his life. It was only three words, yet the feelings within had the most genuine confession. At the same time, all of the following doubts ran through his mind.

Is this for real? Why? Why did Inaba say this so suddenly now? How about Nagase? Inaba have always thought of letting Nagase and I become a pair! What will other relationships transform into?

Taichi had thought about it actually.

Although it was only a thought, he told himself it had to be only a misunderstanding.

Taichi had always thought it was only his own inclination.

This was because he couldn't find a reason for Inaba to love him. It was obvious that Inaba was superior to him.

This didn't mean he was worse than Nagase or others, but he had always felt Inaba was more like an adult, so Taichi had always believed this wouldn't happen.

Speaking from some sense, Inaba had also been a person he respected. Although Inaba was not perfect and flawless and had her weak side, which Taichi could understand, he had still taken Inaba as a powerful being who would teach him a lot of things.

What could he give to Inaba who was so powerful?

Taichi had always been so deeply convinced of this.

He was, indeed, a stubborn person who would only think of himself.

Had he truly considered the feelings of others?

Had he only forced his own ideals, wishes, or things he reckoned was right on others?

Taichi looked at Inaba, who was shivering and averting her eyes. She looked nervous and scared at the same time. She was the Inaba who squeezed the magical three words after a long silence.

Taichi had never realised Inaba loved him so much.

After all, he wouldn't know if she didn't tell him—this was one thing, but if he had to tell himself that he didn't feel a thing before that, he was wrong. He had to be observant of others. He had to do this since he wasn't living on his own.

This was when Taichi came back to his senses.

In front of him, Inaba, shivering had a red face, her eyes lowered.

Rats. He hadn't made any response. He shouldn't have let her wait for him for so long!

The impact was so huge that some part of his thinking processes died.

Taichi was confused. His head was in a panic. Nagase, the matters of their club, and other matters of their class rolled along his mind. There were many options in his mind, and he could see the results stretching from these options. All of them were ones that may bring a huge impact to them.

Inaba suddenly lifted her head.

Although her round, teary eyes were shivering, her thin, long eyes caught Taichi directly.

All other things in this world vanished instantly.

Taichi only wanted to accept Inaba's feelings bluntly, and tell her his.

Taichi commenced, "I...am glad to hear you say you love me, Inaba. I am truly, from the depths of my heart, proud."

Taichi stopped for a while and continued, "But now, I still love Nagase."

He wanted to stay at the smile Nagase had at the moment.

There was a pause about half the time needed for a complete breath.

Taichi was expecting to see how Inaba would react, only to see her laughing cheerfully.

Although her expressions were twisted, her smile was brilliant.

"Is that so? I knew it. Still, didn't you say 'now'? Doesn't that mean there is a chance for me later?"

Inaba showed a joyfully satisfied smile.

"N-No. This isn't what I meant."

"After all, you guys haven't really got along with each other. Besides, you might not be lifelong couples with Iori. It's too easy to intervene the love between high school students."

Then, like a kid having found a great malicious act, she smiled mischievously.

"Ahah. Also, I've told Iori I would do this. So you can be rest assured. We will have a formal and great fight. You don't have to worry about it. You only need to do according to your need. You can leave the rest to us to solve."

"Hey, hey. Wait! Things are developing way too fast! What the heck? It sounds as if Nagase and you are fighting over for me..."

"You're completely right, so you have to get a hang of yourself, Yaegashi Taichi. After all, two wonderful ladies have fallen in love with you!"

Inaba spit out her tongue, smiling maliciously.

"W-Wait! Hold on a minute! I'll be troubled! I'll really be troubled! Tell me. What should I do?"

"Don't ask me, idiot."

As Inaba said that, she walked close to Taichi, stopping before she was about to hit him.

She placed her left hand on Taichi's right shoulder and closing in her face to Taichi's left ear.

The two of them was so close that they could already feel each other sticking to the other person. Inaba's warmth spewed from her mouth embraced Taichi's ear.

"See for yourself! I'll make you can't help falling in deep love with me!"

Inaba's voice directly reverberated in his mind as if Inaba was eroding him.

"Also, you've done that to me once anyway. It's the same if you do it another time, isn't it?"

Inaba grasped Taichi's chin, pushing her face towards Taichi's.

Her beautiful, black hair. Her long, thin eyes. Her slender eyelashes.

Their lips were about to touch each other.

It was very hot and soft.

When these senses had gone into them, they removed their lips immediately.

"This is my first strike. I'll go to the clubroom next week. Thanks a bunch."

Inaba showed a smile like fooling someone around and licked her lips.

To be honest, Taichi's heart had accelerated to such a fast speed he felt he might die.



Leaving Taichi at a loss, Inaba left with her back sticking to Taichi.

She left elegantly and at ease, lest she would realise her dirty heart would explode at any moment.

However she thought, she couldn't stop her footsteps from accelerating.

Be that as it may, she still suppressed herself from running before she turned the corner of the building.

The moment she turned the corner, she dashed off.

Dash. Dash. Dash. She dashed with a speed she had never run with.

Or she should say she had run too much today. She was an introvert, so her muscles would sore a lot for a moment, but it didn't matter.

Inaba escaped to a dim corner in the north building.

Having used a second to check no one was around, she sat down on the floor.

"Ah...How embarrassing...I'm about to die...I really kissed him."

She cried on the floor alone. Then, she burst into laughter: "Aha. Haha. Ahahahaha!"

Her lips still had Taichi's touch.

What should she do? Should she wipe it off? Should she lick it? Should she spit?

Her body was so hot. Her chest was so painful. She felt she was about to vomit. Was this the feeling of love?

Everything was under the control of her feelings. She couldn't think rationally any more; she slowly became an idiot.

Ahah, still...

...it felt surprisingly nice.

Epilogue

"I'm out."

In the morning, Inaba said and closed the door of the gate.

She turned back and glimpsed at her brother, a university student, looking back at her on the stairs with an in-awe expression.

"...Himeko, don't you usually go out without leaving a word?"

"Quiet, you idiot!"

She slammed the door and went outside.

The morning air was getting colder and colder, but today was bright and good so the afternoon should be warmer.

After a week of tutoring outside of school, «Balloon Vine» unpredictably appeared in the clubroom. He appeared as Gotou Ryuusen, the teacher of class 1C, as though it was taken for granted.

What he said was concise.

It was that the condition had become uninteresting now and the most interesting stuff had happened so he decided to terminate it now.

After that, that bullshit phenomenon ended.

What he said about "Everyone seemed to be used to this...and had also developed immunity..." made us speechless; because we could not do anything to what he said, we left him alone.

Will there be another one? I think there must be. The next time we will have to plan a complete counterattack to defeat that guy.

But to be honest, to counter «Balloon Vine» is a bit difficult and the odds seem against us.

Nevertheless, even if he produces another strange phenomenon, we will have ways to solve it—I will think of a way.

This way of thinking is just like Taichi...Inaba thought and gave a slight smile.

Why do those guys frown upon seeing me smile by myself on a road? I did not really smile that exaggeratedly...or did I?

Inaba thought afresh as she walked on the road to school.

Why would I like Taichi?

Was it because he is the boy I talk with the most?

Was it because he would sacrifice himself to save others no matter who they are?

Was it because he also saved me?

All of these do not seem right; let me look a bit deeper.

It is strange for me to say this, but my personality is greatly twisted; and because of this I would act depending on my gain and loss. If I ever found a loophole, I would want to exploit it.

I could not help but think that the people around me would think the same as me because I am that kind of person.

Maybe others would also act depending on their gain and lost. If I lower my guard they will maybe exploit it—I could not help but think like this.

So, I made a firm wall around myself.

Because of my extreme timidity, I tried to collect more information than other people to make myself more advantageous; I would make myself look strong in order to prevent myself from being attacked, and that made me trapped in a nutshell.

Problems would not arise if I trap myself. For example—like how Yui faced this phenomenon.

Maybe I had that feeling all along, but I had not met any scary things even when I am so timid.

When I trap myself, however, what I could gain was little, because on many occasions I was unable to pursue what I really wanted. Even if what I want was put in front of me, I could not stick my hand out because I was afraid I would get hurt.

So in the end I kept losing things; but I would not suffer any pain from that so I did not lose my feelings.

The truth is, however, I had already lost them.

I had lost a lot of things, including important things.

It was indeed painful and tiresome to expose the truest me. I would get hurt easily because there were not any protective gears, nor could I deceive myself into believing it was only a scar on the surface. But because of my living as myself I could have another spectacular taste of life.

This should be said as high risk and high return, right?

It was not until I met Yaegashi Taichi, who had no protective gears that I tried presenting the real me; before that, I thought that the real me was extremely ugly and no one would care for the real me.

Taichi's bluntness made me afraid; his honesty scared me; and he always used his truest self in a match.

He was so powerful that I could not match up to him.

Am I wishing to be like him? — maybe a little different from that.

Do I want to know the secret of his power? — this may be possible.

The most important thing was I extremely wanted to believe in myself to have a match with Taichi using my real self.

Of course, the things that a girl like me would know was not a big deal. Or maybe what I got is all wrong from the beginning to the end.

This, however, was what I thought.

Before, I just longed to safeguard my own world, but after I entered the Literature Club I found out it did not work. There were too many things I did not know. If I kept living like this I would be left alone, and so, I tried to slightly open my world.

I want to include the five of us members in my world.

I like this kind of world which delights me.

When I decided to pursue this world I tried to use my real self to make contact with the outside world. I want to get rid of the nutshell and directly feel—feel the happiness that I wouldn't feel if I kept hiding in the nutshell.

After that, I was interested in Taichi who has no shell and would sometimes even break the shells of others.

Maybe this was the reason.

I tried to look for a reason...but did I find it?

Maybe, it was something that could not be explained by theories.

In other words, there was no reason.

It was only some kind of imagination women naturally have.

Although I pretended to be omniscient, I do have a stack of things I do not know. Or maybe I was the most ignorant person in the Literature Club because of my hiding in the nutshell.

Living in an environment with only brothers was also a reason. But the most important thing was that I was afraid I would become a weak girl, so I always posed a strong attitude like a boy. I thought I would be easily exploited if I were belittled.

But maybe it was better if I could be a bit more like a girl.

I feel that a new world is opening.

Though I reckon that I could not change anything now.

I hate being someone that could do nothing but be protected like a 'princess'. I also hate others crossing certain boundaries and stepping into my heart, so I

always reject others from calling me 'Himeko'. But first let me allow others to call me by my name.

"Himeko."

I tried to mutter in an extremely low voice.

...It did not feel right; I should wait for a little later to do this.

I could see the school and the increasing numbers of pedestrians.

Because of the 'unleash of desires', I have held back. But it was time to accelerate and do my best. Let me fight head on with my all my might to pursue what I want.

Let me become a greedy person so as to say what I want.

And then, let me like myself.

I must first like myself to state my like for someone else.

How could one say "please like me" but hate oneself?

This was my first love.

How could I concede?

The reverse strike of Inaba Himeko starts now!

The conditions given are unfavourable, but this is just right. After all, however I try persuading them, they do not seem to progress. Even if their relationship had reached the ending mark it would not be a problem as long as I hurry to there from the outside in one gulp of air. I would never lose.

I, however, do not plan to go in hot pursuit. Holding things and not letting go forever is not my personality. Utilising ideas and plans to let him not help but fall in love with me was my way.

But I would give up when I lost.

Because it is not a tragedy.

Even if I were dumped, Taichi, Iori, Yui and Aoki will still be at my side.

This friendship bond we have will be unbroken even if I do not do my best to protect it.

So let me open the door! Through this I could see the path. I did not know before; but now I do. By pursuing and leaping forward I could know so much more.

For example, I found out something recently.

Humans are not creatures who just suspect, hate, dislike, keep distances, hide, escape, abominate, and reject.

Humans live to love and be loved.

(Kokoro Connect Volume 2 Random Wounds The End)

Author's Notes

Thank you for picking up this book to read.

My name is Sadanatsu Anda.

This book is the second book in the 'Kokoro Connect' series, and is also the second book I've written.

Readers who have read the first novel, 'Kokoro Connect Random People' will probably enjoy this book more, so for readers who haven't read the first book yet, please also take a look at it.

Right, so this next part of the Author's Notes is for readers who have already read the first book.

Readers who have finished reading the book notwithstanding, people who are starting the book from this Author's Notes, or even people who have only read the title should have noticed that this novel is different from the first novel, and does not have personality swapping.

I will say sorry to the people who had expectations of that kind of situation right here.

But those extremely active characters from the first novel are still working hard giving their all.

If you would, please warmly watch over their growth.

Having more and more people watching the characters grow is the happiest thing for an author.

There's an unusually large amount of pages for the Author's Notes this time.

If there wasn't any point to it, I probably wouldn't be able to stomach it, so this time I want to use the author introduction on the inside flap of the cover to start off the topic.

In the introduction, I wrote that my favorite food is 'all types of noodles' and that my favorite wrestling move is the 'Shooting Star Press'.

Well, I now want to ask, what is the favorite food of you readers?

Or what is your favorite wrestling move of you readers (Please don't send in mails complaining about how you have absolutely no interest in wrestling moves)?

I kind of envy people who can spontaneously name what their favorite food is confidently.

To people who can state their favorite wrestling moves in an instant, we should be able to get along very well, let's have a chat next time we meet.

.....

The moment I mention wrestling, the subject will pretty much veer off, so let's put the topic of wrestling aside.

What I'm really trying to express, is that under certain circumstances, trying to list out my favorite things is actually rather unexpectedly difficult.

Perhaps it's not a very common occurrence, but I think everyone should also have a chance to fill out a personal profile, or to have others ask about their own personal hobbies.

At times like this, for example, to questions such as "What is your favorite food", is everyone's answer the same every time?

To be honest, my answer isn't always the same.

Because aren't most food very tasty anyway?

Regardless of whether it's Japanese food, Chinese food, Italian food or Spanish food, they each have unique glammers and flavours.

Whether it's a main course, side dish or dessert, they all have different purposes and tastes.

So why not say that most food is very tasty (reiterating again).

To select the one food that tastes the best, is simply an impossible task.

Therefore, to answer the question "What is your favorite food", it will drastically change depending on my circumstances, my emotions and my health at the time.

Because of these causes, after hesitating for a very long time, this time I have generalized my favorite food as "all types of noodles".

Hmm, in the end I still don't know what exactly I'm trying to express.

Well, I'll just briefly sum it all up.

"Although I wrote in my author's profile that my favorite food is 'all types of noodles', don't think that using noodles can send away this fellow! I also like sushi and meats! As a side note, when someone treats me to dinner, I like eating more expensive and luxurious things!"

That is my conclusion.

Even though I wrote it this way myself, to whom is this Author's Notes useful for?

Other than myself, I can't think of anyone.

Since I will be writing these, then, don't write unnecessary things on my author's profile from the start — I did actually think about this before.

Nah, perhaps there are readers that upon reading the Author's Notes, will learn that "a different type of question asked can allow us to only hear half the answer".

...if only there were readers like that.

So, here comes my word of thanks!

Firstly, I would like to thank all readers that bought the previous volume, readers that have read and sent replies, readers that have promoted my books, as well as readers that wrote letters to me (thank you very much, I will happily treasure them). Because of everyone's support, this series was able to publish a second volume.

I give my thanks to all of the above.

Next are those that assisted me before this book was published, even though I couldn't give my thanks to each of you individually, I still give all my thanks from the bottom of my heart.

Especially to the editor whom I have caused quite a few difficulties for, from this day on please take care.

To Shiromizakana-sensei who once again drew fantastic illustrations, thank you very much.

I think it's rare to see illustrations that fit so easily with the phrase "bought for the cover".

Hopefully this book won't be overshadowed by its illustrations.

Finally, to all that have picked up and read this book, you have my absolutely greatest gratitude.

I hope we will meet again.

April 2010, Sadanatsu Anda.

ありがとう
ございました♡

INABA
&
IORI♡



References

1. ↑ The 'A' used here refers to the sound of 'あ' in Japanese. Most Japanese schools arrange student numbers according to the hiragana order of their surnames.
2. ↑ Techno is a form of electronic dance music (EDM) that emerged in Detroit, Michigan in the United States during the mid to late 1980s.
3. ↑ Misattribution effect or drawbridging effect in the Misattribution Theory. It states that the feelings, emotions, and perceptions of people are effected by their surroundings and the situation they are in.
4. ↑ Jidaigeki (時代劇) is a genre of film, television, and theatre in Japan. Literally "period dramas", they are most often set during the Edo period of Japanese history, from 1603 to 1868.
5. ↑ Miss used in Japanese has the same pronunciation as mother-in-law.
6. ↑ Unless the person is an otaku or NEET
7. ↑ This line seems to come from the hedgehog dilemma, though it is not stated in the novel. In the hedgehog dilemma, hedgehogs seek to become close to one another in order to share heat during the winter, yet they must remain apart, however, as they cannot avoid hurting one another with sharp pines.
8. ↑ The author made a mistake here. There are more times, but I don't want to count them.
9. ↑ Scorched rice at the bottom of the pan.

10. ↑ Psychologically, it is possible to think—or in this case: clarify feelings—in short given time, as the conscious of our brain accelerates when we are in great danger or trouble. This is why the time we perceive seems to drift in varying speeds when we are in different situations.
11. ↑ Breathing is an involuntary action. It need not be controlled by our conscious mind.
12. ↑ About to cry: when Taichi said something bad to Inaba in v2 that made her about to cry and isolate herself from the club members. Actually, 'Inaba's body' cried in v1, but it was Iori in his body, so Taichi, even though having seen 'Inaba's body' crying, haven't seen Inaba herself crying.

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